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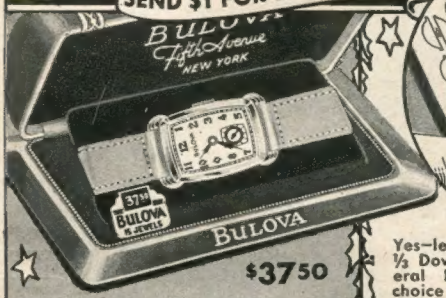

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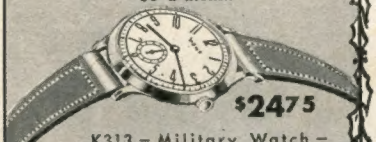

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FEBRUARY ISSUE ON SALE JANUARY 8TH

Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

Vol. 108, No. 3 for January, 1943 Best of New Stories

Something to Shoot At . . . . . T. F. TRACY 11
Sergeant Acuna was the smartest jungle fighter in the ranks of the Filipino Scouts. All he craved was something to shoot with—and a Jap for a target.

A Shift of Cargo . . . . . RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS 24
It was all very well for Captain Scudder to declare he would never give up the ship. That wasn't the question. The ship was giving up Scudder.

Black Billions . . . . . VINSON BROWN & THEODORE O. ZSCHOKKE 34
The Bocas del Toro bush is a paradise for any naturalist but the day Johnny teamed up with Sergeant Wick of the Mounted Artillery on a "collecting" expedition he learned that there are plenty of queer things besides botanical specimens to be found in the Panama hinterland.

Cimarron Crossing . . . . . BILL GULICK 44
Frieze was a whiz with a slide-rule and a set of blueprints. There was no getting around that. The only trouble was, the kid needed practical experience. No logarithm table in the world can tell a man how to set an eighty-foot pole in quicksand before a head of flood water hits the spot.

The Cat and the Perch (a novelette) . . COMMANDER C. T. S. GLADDEN 52
We'd been a lucky submarine till the bombing of Cavite brought that damn black cat aboard. From that moment on, under a China Sea full of hell and Japs, the *Perch* was only a floating laboratory to demonstrate that pig-boat men as well as pussy cats can muster nine lives as needed.

The Infallible Nose of Corporal Blue . . . GEORGE CORY FRANKLIN 66
Skeeter Welton didn't think it would make a pretty bed-time story to tell his grandchildren—that he'd sent a poor little orphan mule to fight for him when he couldn't get in the army back in '41. But that was before Corporal Blue followed his nose and went AWOL after the magpie died.

To the Last Man (conclusion) . . . . . WILLIAM E. BARRETT 74
Craig Archer and his gallant band fight their way over the fearful blizzard-swept Andean heights to join O'Higgins and San Martin in the final carnage that freed a continent from the Spanish overlord.

Glory to Spare (a fact story) . . . . . H. H. HAWKINS 112
When the first air mail crossed American skies the papers boasted two days had been saved. Two days hell! The Pony Express saved twenty.

The Camp-Fire . . . . Where readers, writers and adventurers meet 114
Ask Adventure . . . . . Information you can't get elsewhere 6
The Trail Ahead . . . . . News of next month's issue 128
Lost Trails . . . . . Where old paths cross 126

Cover painted for Adventure by Charles De Feo

Kenneth S. White, Editor

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Request:—I am a collector of smoking pipes and related equipment from all over the world and am interested in obtaining a native-made pipe and perhaps a tobacco container, a pouch or box of some kind, from New Zealand to round out the interesting collection I now have. By "native-made" I mean characteristic of the Maoris or whatever natives are the original inhabitants of New Zealand. What I wish to obtain is not necessarily a rare or extremely unusual piece but just typical of crude native workmanship (perhaps decorated) and made of native materials—I would prefer one that is *old* and *used*—in other words one made by the natives for use and not the tourist trade.

Can you tell me where to send for one, how much, how to send money, shipping costs, etc.?

—Fred E. Hill, Jr.
27 Norris Bldg.
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Reply by Tom L. Mills:—The war places a very heavy embargo on many exports, but even before the war the export of Maori curios was prohibited. However, quite apart from all that, the severest blow for you is that the aborigines of Maoriland never have smoked the pipe of peace, because tobacco came to New Zealand with the ready-made pipe. There is no such thing as a crude native-made smoking pipe. This country has been settled by English, Irish and Scots for just 100 years; and 50 years before that whalers from your own and other countries visited parts of the two islands. So that for 150 years Maori men and women have been and still are smoking pipes imported from overseas. Sorry!

ON THE care and feeding of crows.

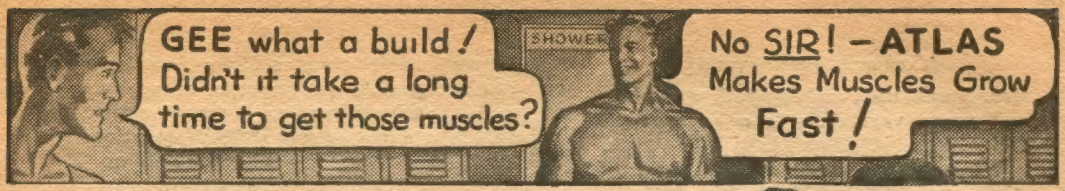
Request:—I have an opportunity to get a young crow for a pet. Could you tell me how to go about taming it, or rather domesticating it? It occurs to me that that may be a "poser" for one like yourself, whose interest in birds is scientific. However, some information on the feeding and living habits of crows with some advice on care of the bird's well-being would be extremely helpful.

Must I clip its wings? If so, where and how much? Can I teach it to talk? I have heard that you must split its tongue in order to do so. I confess that I do not like that idea, but perhaps you could tell me of that, or other methods. I think from the above questions you will gather the kind of advice I need.

—Harry Kolbe
2441 Brown St.,
Flint, Mich.

Reply by Davis Quinn:—If very young, feed crow boiled mashed potato mixed with egg yolk hardboiled, make up fresh daily, it may be fatal if sour. Feed hourly from 6 a.m. to near dark, introduce food into mouth by means of small stick. Important: at each feeding dip stick in water and place in mouth. When food is not promptly swallowed bird is no longer hungry. Young bird will consume 8 meals a day, which is at least half its weight in food, and will eat more if offered. If bird is in pin feather stage it is probably a couple of weeks old, and this diet may be varied with *ripe* fruit and green vegetables. After bird is grown it is well to offer it all the ripe fruit and green vegetables it will take. Mature crows are carnivorous. They will eat and seem to thrive on most anything they can get from food delicacies to car-

(Continued on page 8)



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City ..... State .....

(Continued from page 6)

rion. Bread, milk and egg yolk plus fruits and green vegetables is a good staple diet.

When young, keep bird in nest of sticks, not cotton. Cover its abode at night with an opaque cloth, otherwise the young bird may awake at the most ungodly hour in the morning, when of course it will *have* to be fed. It is much wiser to leave your crow in the nest till it is all ready to step out on its own, when it will be, I believe, about six weeks old.

Regarding taming, if reared in a danger-free environment, your bird should have small opportunity to develop a fear complex.

DON'T slit tongue to make it talk! At best this bird has enough trouble trying to reproduce the human voice with its primitive vocal equipment. I know of no method of teaching it to talk. The bird simply will pick this up. Some individuals are rather successful at it.

Pet crows are a big source of amusement. Their sense of humor, finding its greatest expression in practical jokes, rivals that of man himself. A hand-reared crow, like a dog or parrot, may become very devoted to a certain human, exhibiting along with its wit and pranks an affection that is evident as it is appealing. And, to a limited extent, these crow pets do learn to talk. Some have learned to imitate the bark of a dog or cluck of a rooster, and some to call the cat, or even the cows! Such short words as Fred, father, mother, and phrases like "come on John," "hello Jo," "aw go on," are pronounced more or less easily.

Do not clip the wings.

Good luck!

WEAPONS of our enemies and allies.

Request:—1. What is the caliber and make of the Japanese Army rifle and sidearms? Description of these would be appreciated.

2. What is the caliber and make of the Russian Army rifle and sidearms?

3. What is the caliber and make of the Chinese Army rifle and sidearm? I realize of course that a country that has been at war as long as China must have a large variety of firearms of various makes and calibers, so I imagine that this is a more or less difficult question.

—Wm. R. Fellion
Box 442
Plattsburg, N. Y.

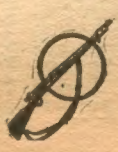
Reply by Donegan Wiggins:—1st. The Japanese Service rifle is a modified Mauser bolt action, with a straight projecting belt handle, and a cover on the bolt, separate from it. Open military sights, barrel length 31.3 inches, caliber 6.5 MM rimless, or 256. They would appear, from the illustrations in the British Service "Textbook of Small Arms," my only source of information, to be a rather long and clumsy arm, a view confirmed by pictures in magazines in the past year or so. They call it the "39th Year Model."

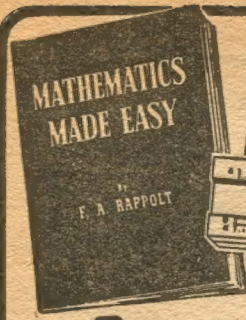
The Japanese handgun is the 7.65 MM automatic pistol, somewhat resembling the Luger in appearance, but not in mechanism, especially the locking device, and called the Mambu. I only know of ONE in the United States, that being in the hands of Dexter, the gun and curio dealer at Topeka, Kansas. But I fancy there will soon be a lot of them here, as captured relics.

2nd. The Russian rifle is the 7.62 MM Three Line, a bolt action of clumsy design, with a five shot single column magazine, and coarse sights, but good ballistics. No safety, save pulling the cocking piece back slightly, and turning it to the left. But the rifle's very simplicity makes it a good arm for rough work in the open, I think. I own one, and while I have not fired it, I have shot others, and found them all right, if used with the 7.62 MM cartridge. BUT, beware the ones altered to use our .30-06.

I think the Russians use mostly the German Mauser, or Bergman pistols, but have nothing on this positively. I understand they used Bergmans and Mausers recently.

3rd. I have seen photos of Russian rifles, and Colt Browning heavy machine guns, and Tommy guns, in the hands of Chinese troops. They use any available arms.





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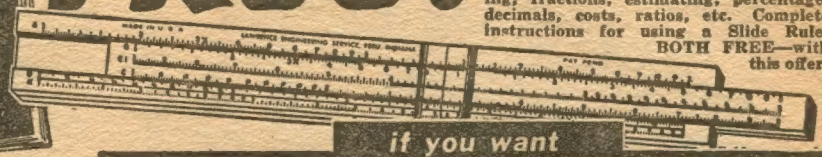

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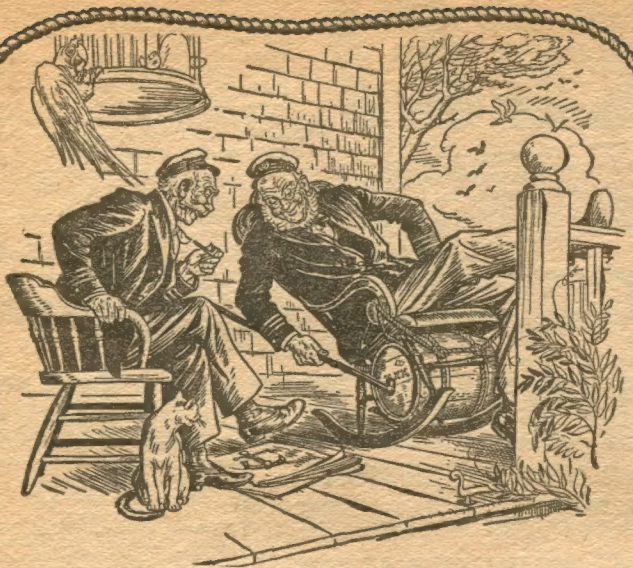

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by don herald

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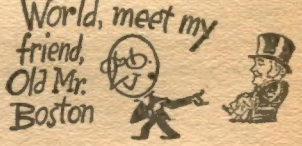

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"There you are, Tojo," the sergeant said.

SOMETHING TO SHOOT AT

By T. F. TRACY

"THEY got clean away," the little Filipino corporal said, grinning through his bandages. He spoke to the man beside him in a low voice, keeping his back turned to the Japanese guard.

The sirens at the prison camp were still wailing, a bugle was frantically assembling the off-duty reliefs at the double-quick hurry-hurry, and excited Japanese officers, many of them still wearing bandages, were scurrying off to

their posts before the guard barracks, buckling their gun belts around their hips.

"Who were they?" the lance-jack Scout asked, his voice a murmur in the hubbub of the stockade.

"Sergeant Acuna of B Company and another guy," the corporal said. "They've got a good start."

"They'll need it," the lance-jack said. "Look at that."

A Japanese detail with six big dogs in leash were doubling across the cleared land toward the woods where the two prisoners of the timber detail had made their escape.

"I hope they managed to get a gun," the corporal said anxiously.

"That guard they bumped must have had a gun. This gang all carry salvaged Springfields."

"The Japs will try very hard to stop them," the corporal said soberly. "If they get through to the Pularqui with what they know about the new Jap troop concentrations, old Nishimoto will have a date with a knife." He paused and added in a still lower voice: "If they don't get through, our outfits will probably get caught and knocked to pieces."

"Acuna is very smart," the lance-jack said. "*Es muy agudo*. And one of the best shots in the Scouts."

"I only hope he has something to shoot with—and at," the corporal said.

THEY came out of the cassia scrub onto a long stony ridge sparsely patched with course grass and stunted acacia trees. Now that they were clear of the thrash of branches there was no mistaking the baying of the dogs. Both men halted, jerking their heads up and a little to one side, the bright rills of sweat shining on their tense brown faces. The faint yap-yap, and then the deep throaty boom of hounds running on a trail came clearly from the cane fields and abaca thickets behind them.

"They've got dogs all right, Mario," the taller man said, speaking in English. He jerked his right shoulder a little, shifting the position of the rifle under his arm.

He was a trim compact man, rather tall for a Filipino, with an alert light-colored face and quick dark eyes. He wore the uniform of the Filipino Scouts except for a strip of green webbing worn around his head like a bandage. His left shirt-sleeve carried the plain stripes of a duty sergeant. The rifle which he carried cradled under his arm was an Army Springfield.

The man with him was short and stocky with a round gloomy face and had the strap of his campaign hat passed under his chin. A short odd-looking pistol was thrust into his waistband, but he carried no rifle.

"How many cartridges you got left, Sergeant Acuna?" he asked. He spoke in Spanish.

The sergeant held up two forefingers. "*No más que dos*," he said.

He started to run again, heading down the ridge.

The gloomy scout swóre softly.

"That's bad," he said lengthening his stride to keep up with the sergeant. "I don't like the dogs. I didn't know the Japs had dogs. I never saw any dogs around that stockade."

The sergeant gestured with the muzzle of his rifle toward a grove of acacia trees standing down the rough slope to their right.

"Quetana's house is down there," he said. "If we can make it there we'll be all right."

"Quetana is with the second detachment up around Lake Lanao."

"I know, but he's got an old model thirty-caliber Springfield of his own. We'll find cartridges there."

"How are we going to get in?"

"I'll show you," the sergeant said.

He was worrying about it himself. Quetana's house was not the usual bamboo and Nipa structure but a solid house of Lauan slabs with heavy wooden shutters and doors, having been the quartermaster shed of an old camp.

"We'll get in all right," he said. "We got to. We got to have those cartridges."

They were running down the rough grassy slope, jumping over clumps of scrub thorn to confuse the dogs. The sergeant kept his eye on the little grove down-slope.

"If I can only get a handful of cart-

ridges, I'll fix those Jap dogs all right. I'll fix their dogs and I'll fix some of them!"

The sweat was streaming down his face and he wiped it with his sleeve. It was hard going in the scrub and thick grass and there were dark patches on their shirts where the sweat had soaked through the khaki and made the cloth stick to their bodies.

"You can hear the dogs," Mario panted.

Sergeant Acuna jerked his head in answer. "I know."

He knew that they must be getting very close to have the sound of their baying come clear above the swish of the heavy grass. He looked anxiously at the broad back and short thick legs of his companion, wondering how long Mario could keep up the pace. His own chest muscles were beginning to hurt from the long strain and his legs felt dull and clumsy. He turned his head a little to squint up at the sun. Around two o'clock. . . . That made over two hours since they had made their break from the prison camp.

"We haven't got far to go, Mario," he said. "You can see the creek."

THE course of the creek was now plain. All the old cultivated ground on the near side had gone back to scrub and cogon grass. Where the creek curved off to the right toward the Pularqui River there was more clear land, grass, and papaya groves and the fields of villages. Across the creek was heavy forest. Sergeant Acuna's eyes followed the curve of the creek. If they could make it to the woods, and get rid of the dogs, they would be fairly safe till they had to come into the clear again at the Palma road. The Japs had had some bad experiences in the woods and did not like to go into them.

"Quetana's looks closed," Mario said.

They were running under the first acacias and as they turned down the path through the fly-catcher bush, Sergeant Acuna saw that the heavy door was shut, board shutters were pulled to on the windows.

"It's one of those flat American locks, Mario. See if that Jap pistol you got can shoot it out."

"I have no confidence in it," Mario said.

He held the short-barreled pistol a few inches from the door and pulled the trigger. The bullets made neat holes in the tough Lauan wood panel.

"Push!" said the sergeant.

They threw their shoulders against the door. The lock bar rattled in its grooves and held firm.

"Not practical," Mario said speaking in Spanish again. "We'd better run for it."

"Throw that goddam thing away!" the sergeant said savagely.

He thrust the muzzle of his Springfield almost against the lock.

The high velocity bullet split the lock panel and pieces of broken iron casing clattered on the floor inside.

"Give it another!" Mario said, throwing his shoulder against the door.

Sergeant Acuna held the muzzle of the rifle two inches above and to the left of the first hole. The panel split sharply as he fired and splinters of clear reddish wood feathered out in the space between the bullet holes.

"Give it the butt," Mario said.

Acuna swung the rifle back and jammed the butt hard against the splintered panel, throwing all his weight into the thrust. The iron bolt slipped a little in its shattered gears, but did not pull clear.

Mario looked anxiously over his shoulder. "It is of an unbelievable toughness," he said.

"I think it's coming."

The rifle butt slammed solidly against the panel, the bolt flew clear of the smashed cogs, and the door burst open, the sergeant following it into the room exactly as an unbalanced bayonet man will follow his own long thrust.

A little of the old quartermaster shelving still stood along the opposite wall interspaced here and there with wooden cupboards. A rifle in a dark canvas case stiff with oil was hanging from a wire hook in an old gun rack.

"Where are the cartridges?" Mario said.

"They must be in one of those *ar-*

marios. You look in those down there."

"By God," said Mario. "We'd better not have to look in too many of them."

"I know he always keeps them here," the sergeant said.

"Those dogs are going to be on our tail," Mario said jerkily, pulling at the latched cupboard doors.

"That's why we got to have the cartridges," Acuna said.

"Maybe we can beat them off with the rifles?" Mario said nervously.

"Maybe," the sergeant said.

It was very hot in the long closed-up house and the sweat dripped off their faces as they tugged at the stiff latches. The booming voices of the dogs came in through the open door.

"If they're here," said Mario bitterly, "they'll be in the last one."

The sergeant jerked hard at a tight door and swore softly to himself as his sweaty hands slipped on the worn latch.

"I'm going to look in these middle ones," Mario said. "We'll never get through all of them."

"Take them in order!" the sergeant said sharply. "We can't start jumping around."

Mario opened the cupboard next in line. "This is all fishing junk," he said gloomily.

"Here they are!" the sergeant said, shouting the words in sudden relief.

There were two shelves in the cupboard that he had just flung open and on the higher shelf a dozen clips of Regulation U. S. .30 cartridges were piled in a neat stack.

The sergeant swept them down into his cradled arm and started for the door stuffing clips into his pocket.

"Take these!" He thrust four of the clips at Mario who was jerking the old Springfield out of its case. The last clip he shoved into his rifle, slamming home the bolt.

"Now we'll see," he said, stepping out to the entrance ramp.

THE dogs were in plain sight, strung out along the grassy slope, rangy sand-colored hounds with their muzzles down to the trail and big lunging pinschers with evil-looking heads, their coarse hackles stiff on their necks.

"Come on," Acuna said. "Hit for the creek. They'll have snipers on that ridge any minute."

He took several strides back along the path and with a running jump cleared a bush off the right of the path. The creek was straight ahead. He ran heavily, dodging the old stumps.

"They'll get held up a little while at the house," he said as Mario came up beside him.

"Those black devils go right for you once they get anywhere near," Mario said. "They're not hounds."

Sergeant Acuna grinned thinly. The solid weight of the loaded cartridge clips in his pocket was suddenly making him feel good.

"When they get close," he said, "we will give each one a bullet. Then they will be nothing."

"They'll probably come all bunched up."

"That's why we want to make the creek," the sergeant said.

He could hear the puzzled yap-yap of the hounds at the cabin behind and he was seeing the bright water of the creek fifty yards ahead through the scattered bush and bamboo clumps.

They went into the water without breaking their stride, holding their rifles high above their heads. The creek was nearly hip deep on a stony bed and they walked jerkily, lifting their knees high.

"Here's number one." Mario said.

Acuna turned around.

The big leader had come out of the brush and was close to the water. At the creek's edge she came to a dead halt, still yelping with that snuffling eagerness that signals a hot trail.

"There you are, Tojo," the sergeant said.

The bullet hit her in front of the shoulder and she slumped forward, her head and shoulders in the water, her pink rag of tongue still hanging out. Acuna slammed the bolt of his rifle and ploughed up the stony slope into shallow water.

"Here!" Mario called holding his hand out to him from a clump of bamboo. The sergeant dropped on one knee

among the young bamboos, resting the barrel of his rifle across a branch of an old sapodilla tree.

Two hounds broke cover on the opposite slope running in tandem straight along the trail, as the leader had come. The sergeant shot them both at the edge of the creek. The bodies of the hounds made a little brownish heap at the rim of the pool.

Acuna jumped the rifle bolt twice, shoved in a new clip, and dropped the odd shell in his pocket.

The pinschers did not come in line like the hounds. Their highly developed sense of hearing told them where the quarry was and they made straight for it, the water splashing high around them as they dove into the creek, swimming with a heavy lunging stroke, their short ears laid back, their big bone-cracker muzzles thrust forward, the murderous canines showing clear from the back-drawn lips.

The rifle barrel poking through the bamboo screen swung slowly down into line, stopped, and gave a little jump. The leading pinscher jerked up as a running dog is jerked up at the end of a leash, the high-power bullet catching it in the chest, its impact twisting the animal half around. Its legs continued to move aimlessly a few times as the current carried it down stream.

"*Uno,*" said the sergeant, pumping the rifle bolt. He shifted the gun, bringing the muzzle down deliberately, his trigger finger tightening steadily in the squeeze. "*Dos.*" He worked the bolt with the swift, unhurried precision of an expert mechanic handling a spanner on a rush job. "*Y tres, y finito,*" he said.

The three pinschers, still struggling feebly, were beginning to drift downstream.

"Very good," said Mario, "*muy fino,*" and a little grin of relief settled on his face. "Where do we head for now?"

Sergeant Acuna pushed three extra cartridges into his rifle chamber. "We better take it easy till we get our wind back."

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II

THE two men went into the timber, walking slowly among the huge clean trunks of the hardwoods. Seventy feet above them the massed leafy crowns filtered the sunlight into a green haze. Only here and there, where there were patches of dead trees with silver-white trunks, blocks of sunshine came through to make a reddish glow on the packed leaf mold.

"We'll have to stay close to the creek," the sergeant said. "It's the only way to get to the Palma road. If their patrols have radio sets they'll be on the lookout for us there, too."

"I think they'll be on the lookout all right," Mario said.

"Well, we'll have to try and sneak across. Once we get across we'll be in the woods again for maybe nine kilometers. Then we'll hit the clear space along the Pularqui somewhere near the Bacobo cart bridge. That's where we want to cross. We may run into some trouble there if it's too well covered."

"You think our outfits are still across there?" Mario asked.

The sergeant nodded.

"Some of them are, but there's no telling how many. The rest of the Infantry and the Composite Battalion and several Regular Scout detachments and probably the Reserve detachments and Guerrilleros from the Barrios."

"How do you know?"

"I got it from that B Company corporal they brought in yesterday."

"Corporal Vigario?" Mario asked.

"Yeah. They had him locked up down at Longoz. He told me the Japs had sent patrols across the Pularqui."

"Our outfit must have pulled out then."

A thin smile pulled down the corners of the sergeant's mouth. "The patrols never came back," he said.

Mario's gloomy face broke into a sudden grin, his white teeth glistening.

"They must have settled down," he said.

The sergeant kept on grinning.

"Well," he said, "that's what they wanted, isn't it?"

"How about their river patrol?"

There was a snap just above the sergeant's head like the crack of a whip and the dull *plock* of a bullet hitting a tree trunk.

"Down!" Acuna said. He dove behind a tree.

"Where did that———come from?" Mario said wryly. He brushed leaf mold off his face.

"Crawl up this way, Mario. We're hugging that creek too much." The creek had curved there and almost straight ahead patches of bamboo showed light green between the bare trunks of some dead tindalo trees.

"They've got radios all right," Mario said when they were well into the woods again. "That outfit was laying for us."

"They weren't doing anything else," said the sergeant. "They're very anxious that we don't get through and spill the beans about their troop concentrations."

"Yes," Mario said. "I wonder if they're going to pull an attack up the Catabato road. That's where they've all been heading the past week."

"That's probably just half of it," Acuna said. "Another one will go up by Amayantir."

"The old pocket business," Mario said, "and our outfits would be in the pocket."

"Precisely," the sergeant said, falling into Spanish again. "It is very important that we get through and tell them. Then our detachments could be pulled back and grouped where the roads climb into the hills . . ."

For a moment the gloomy look disappeared from Mario's face.

"I know the perfect place," he said softly. "It is a little beyond Animas. A formidable place. *Un campo pavoroso.* One is in the hills behind a nice log and some vines. Mr. Jap marches on the road. Very straight, very military." He stiffened his legs to mimic the carriage of a Japanese officer. "You line your sights right here," he went on, touching the shirt button right above his trouser band. "Then you squeeze the trigger—"

"Mario," said the sergeant, "I have told you a hundred times, you do not think like a soldier. You think like a head hunter."

"It was not me who knifed that lieutenant," Mario said.

"It was you who killed that guard."

"I do not know that I killed him," Mario said sadly. "I only hit him with a club. He was a very foolish man and turned his back on me to watch you hug that lieutenant. I was greatly disappointed that he had so few cartridges. What did you stick that lieutenant with?"

"An old file," Acuna said, "and I do not like the coarseness of your language. Someone had ground it down very fine and put a bamboo handle on it. I found it among those logs that we felled yesterday."

"It was nice of them to put us on that timber detail," said Mario. "The woods gave us a half hour start."

"I'd feel still better if they didn't have those radio sets."

"And I would feel better if we were across that Palma road," Mario said. "For some reason I do not feel good about that road."

"How's that rifle?" Acuna asked.

"All right. Old, but all right."

MARIO held it up. The old walnut stock was scratched and scarred with years of usage and darkened with oil and sweat. "I would rather have my own," Mario went on. "Or one of those the Japs had in the salvage huts. They must have snared plenty of our guys all together."

"The men were not all captured," Acuna said shortly.

"I suppose they picked up some guns at Anada Creek and Medina," Mario said.

"They picked up plenty," the sergeant said dryly, his mind jerking back to the low brush and rocks along Anada Creek where the men of Company B and the first Scout detachment had tried to hold off a whole Jap regiment in the plunging crossfire of that first surprise attack. There had been rifles to pick up there, and there had been more rifles to pick up on the rutted slopes above, where the remaining companies of the battalion, outnumbered four to one, had gone down to the attack, and there were

"The Jap patrols never came back," Sergeant Acuna said.

rifles, many of them, on the shell-spattered, bullet-splintered plateau where the fight had swirled and eddied across the clumps of scrub thorn and yacal trees . . .

"There's a dog barking up there," Mario said in a low voice.

The sergeant halted and leaned against a tree, listening.

"It's just a village dog," he said after a moment. "Probably in one of the fields. We're getting close to the road."

He pulled up the edges of the green webbing on his head to conceal the white bandage inside. Stripping leafy twigs off a vine he stuck them like feathers in the webbing. The longer pieces of vine he draped around his neck so that the green ends dangled on his shirt front and over his back.

"How's that?" he asked Mario who was soberly wrapping vines around his own hat and shoulders.

"Right out on the road will be the only bad place," Mario said. "Unless we bump smack into some of them."

"That," said Acuna, "we must not do. They are very serious about us."

"And I," said Mario, "am very serious about them. Isn't that the road?"

About fifty yards ahead through a little rift in the tree boles they could see a section of low embankment and a patch of gray crushed-stone surface.

"The bridge will be up there a ways," Acuna said, nodding toward the right. "They're sure to have a guard there.

We'd better ease up to the left a little till we strike some cover."

They walked slowly through the woods going up to their left. Now and then they caught a glimpse of the road, but there seemed to be no movement on it. Heat waves crinkled above the stone surface in the hot afternoon.

"It's too damn quiet," Mario whispered. "Something is wrong."

"Look," the sergeant said. "Let's take a squint at that patch. It looks like good cover."

About thirty yards ahead of them was a piece of land that had been cleared of heavy timber and was now covered with second growth acacia trees and cassia scrub. The brush covered about two acres and projected like a rough arrowhead into the timber.

Acuna put his hand on Mario's arm.

"I'm going to take a peek," he said.

Taking hold of the tendrils of a big ingrato vine he pulled himself up around its stalk, circling the bole of a dead tindalo tree among the rough green vine leaves.

From above the level of the acacia trees he could look up and down a hundred yards of the gray roadbed. Here and there holes in its surface had been patched with some flinty stone on which the sun glinted. Brown pods from the acacia trees speckled the gray stone. The cassia scrub beneath him seemed empty and gave off a spicy smell in the heat.

He crawled down.

"It looks clear," he said, "but I didn't see any weaver birds in the cassia."

"Maybe someone's been along the road lately," Mario said, a faint wrinkle of worry puckering the skin between his brows.

The sergeant took a pair of cartridge clips from his pocket and shoved them down in his waistband.

"Well, we can't stay here," he said. "They'll have a whole army beating these woods pretty quick. Listen, Mario. You stick about ten yards behind me and a little to my right."

"*Bueno.*"

"And don't get nervous and shoot me in the back."

"I have no cartridges to waste on sergeants," Mario said grinning faintly. "*Vaya con Dios.*"

III

ACUNA went into the brush on hands and knees, trailing his rifle carefully in his right hand. The ground under him was a little sandy and he moved quietly, making little detours now and then to avoid eddies of the crackling brown acacia pods. At intervals he stopped to listen, lying flat beside a bush, his head hidden between the branches so that the twigs stuck in his headgear blended with the foliage of the bush. As Mario moved up beside him he went on again, first his left hand moving ahead, then the right hand dragging the rifle, then the left knee coming up under his body, the right knee sliding up to join it.

The road looked empty. The brush along the right-of-way had not been cut that year, there were rough dusty green clumps of it right up to the low embankment. The tops of other bushes showed up across the road. Some acacia trees were growing along the far embankment.

"This is as good as we'll find," Acuna decided.

He lay beside a tall bush waiting for Mario to come up. Mario saw him and stopped. Acuna beckoned him with a finger.

"Might as well make our dash from here."

"I'll go first," Mario said. "You're the sharpshooter. If anyone takes a crack at me you can plug them."

"I'll be two yards behind you," the sergeant said. "Two moving targets rattle most guys. And don't wait for me. Shove right off into the bush."

"See you in church," Mario said.

There was a hard scrabble of pebbles as his feet dug into the sloping embankment and then the firm *plop* of his leather soles hitting the rolled surface.

A shot came from an acacia clump up the road.

From the edge of the embankment, Acuna fired quickly, one-two, the heavy jar of his Springfield drowning the light *plang* of the Jap rifle.

Mario stumbled on the road, but

caught himself and plopped into the brush on the other side.

Acuna fired again as he gained the roadway, sending his bullet ripping into one side of the acacia clump, not so much in the hope of hitting the hidden sniper as to throw him off his aim.

A sapling at the right side of the clump jerked abruptly, bending slowly over, and the *plang* of a rifle came back like a hurried echo to the slam of the Springfield. The bullet whispered past Acuna's head and he dove at the shoulder of the embankment as a football player dives in a flying tackle. His shoulder hit the loose gravel and he rolled, dust spurting up around him, the pebbles slipping and rattling. There was a shallow ditch on that side of the road and he landed in it on his side, his face jammed in the harsh twigs of a cassia bush.

He wormed quickly onto his belly, blowing the dust from the notch of his rear sight. He could not see anything of Mario, but he could see the gray bark of the acacia saplings up against the embankment forty yards away. There was a slight movement of the leaves and he heard the crack of the bullet going over him and then the *plang* of the rifle.

Without moving his eyes from the tree he slid his rifle barrel carefully through the branches of the scrub. There was an old stump in the middle of the acacia cluster and around it the sturdy gray bark of the saplings branched like candelabra.

The Jap sniper fired again. The bullet kicked little splinters of rotten wood out of an old stump off to the right and a hard little smile drew down the corners of Acuna's mouth.

"There's a John," he thought. "Doesn't know where I am and gives himself away by banging off all over the place."

He looked at the acacia stump over his sights. It looked thick and solid. A shot would just let the sniper know that he was still there. As it stood the sniper didn't know what the score was and was just shooting because he was nervous and the bang of the rifle made him feel better. Johns were always like that either alone or in bunches.

SERGEANT ACUNA moved his head very slowly to look at the terrain on his right. There were, maybe, seventy yards of brush between him and the woods. The brush was high and thick enough to offer fair concealment, but would give no protection against fire. Brush wouldn't turn bullets. And a man moving in broken cover was cheated from the start by a man sitting in cover.

There was a rifle in the brush behind his right shoulder. The glint of the sun on the muzzle end caught his eye, and he twisted his head with infinite care, pressing it still harder against the sandy bottom of the ditch, the lean steel snout of the rifle coming inch by inch into his range of vision, the flanged nub of the bayonet holder, the dark wood of the grip, glossy with much rubbing. As his eyes reached that glossed grip he almost jerked his head, recognition and bewilderment flashing together in his mind. Mario's rifle, but where the hell was Mario?

Inching his head around he made out that the rifle was lying in the brush. They must have clipped Mario, he decided, straining his eyes to see into the brush clusters behind him. He turned his head front again, his eyes going back to the acacia clump. There was nothing to be done while that bird was still operating.

The Jap sniper was firing slowly, placing his shots at hazard in the brush. *Plang* would go the rifle and the metallic snick of the bolt would follow as the rifleman threw a fresh shell into the chamber. Then there would be a slight interval as the sniper picked his next spot.

There was a small brown knob on the left of the gray acacia trunk. It was small and roundish like the half of a tennis ball and watching it closely, Sergeant Acuna thought that there was a slight quiver in it each time the sniper fired. He lined his sights on it tentatively, waiting for a definite movement, getting a firm rest for his gun across an old snag. Beads of sweat ran steadily down his face, gathered into a drop that fell with a little splash on the bolt of his rifle and he wiped it away mechani-

cally with his sleeve without lowering his eyes.

Plang went the Japanese rifle, the ringing sound echoing in the hot quiet afternoon. The cupro-nickel slug cracked on a stone, ricocheted off—*zing-zing*.

The brown knob beside the tree moved a little, drawing back almost out of sight and settled back into place again.

Acuna shifted the muzzle of his rifle a fraction to the left. The stock snuggled tightly against his shoulder and two deep creases seamed the left side of his face under the closed eye. He drew in his breath evenly, his curved forefinger tightened firmly on the trigger.

His shoulder jerked to the slam of the Springfield. His right hand jerked with it almost as if it were a part of the mechanism, snicking the rifle bolt back and to with a single motion. His left arm had stiffened at the same time and the snout of the Springfield shifted to the right of the stump.

The brown knob on the acacia disappeared and the head and shoulder of the sniper bobbed among the saplings at the right of the stump in the abrupt involuntary nervous jerk that follows a

bone wound. Acuna had not moved his cheek from the stock, his finger tightened swiftly but smoothly on the trigger and the sniper lurched sideways, slipping down across the twisted saplings.

Acuna turned and faded into the brush behind him.

Mario was lying face down behind a small bush, his right shoulder dark with blood. Acuna knelt beside him, started to put his hand over Mario's heart and stopped the movement halfway. There was a tiny hole on the left side of Mario's neck and another hole the size of a half-dollar under his right ear.

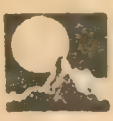
He stumbled and fell sideways as the thirty-caliber slug ripped through his left breast pocket.

"Twenty-five caliber," the sergeant thought automatically. "What rotten luck. If they'd got him anywhere below the neck with one of those things he might still have had a chance."

He turned Mario onto his back and put his campaign hat over his face.

"*Que male suerte!*" he said softly. "That his luck should run out now."

He put his hand in Mario's pocket, took out the three clips of ammunition and stuck them in his own waistband.



NORTH and east of the winding Pularqui River the land rises, breaking irregularly into rocky hills slashed with water courses and ravines. Beyond the hills the crest of the high ranges stand blue-gray on the sky.

Sergeant Acuna laid his course by those far-off blue-gray masses. In the heavy timber he lost them intermittently; but there were patches of dead trees here and there in the timber and at these places he was able to check up on his course. The solid canopy of foliage was

broken, the spreading branches dry and thin, and looking off through the silver-gray dead trunks he made out the tall broken hills. East of the river they ran parallel to his course, but at intervals there appeared straight ahead, a high hazy blue shadow on the sky that he knew was Mount Rogang. The shadows slanted sharply on the dead trees. The sun was getting low.

He walked slowly through the patch of dead trees, feeling the drag of his tired muscles. His feet felt hot and swollen from the long forced trek, the cords and joints in his legs slack with weariness. His feet wanted to lag and it was with an effort of will that he tightened the numbed muscles, stepping warily between the big gray trees that were beginning to look bluish in the fading light. He stopped cautiously against a big tree, his eyes searching the timber ahead and as the soft scuffle of his feet in the leaf mold ceased he caught a new sound, a sound that was faint, but persistent and unchanging, the rush of the Pularqui River riffling over the Bacobo Shoals.

A spring welled out of the sand of a little creek making a pool of clear water in the shallows and he drank from it in little swallows, sitting among the bamboos and cassia brush, resting a little, and then drinking again, the water clean and cool against his hot face.

This creek, he remembered, ran into the river below the bridge. Bamboo and wild bananas grew along its course mixed with creepers and Nipa palms.

"I'll take a look to make sure of the bridge," he decided. "When it's dark I can cut along the creek to the point nearest the bridge. From there on will be the bad part."

He made his way slowly along the creek bottom, stepping on the little swales of clear sand, slipping between clumps of bamboo and rough brown Nipa trunks. The timber on both sides of the creek was thinning out and he could see stumps among the thin trees where the bridge crews had made cuttings and low piles of sawdust where the circular saws had stood.

From the edge of the timber to the river there was a cleared space about sixty yards wide. Low dusty-looking bushes were scattered on the clear space among two-foot clumps of monkeygrass. Acuna could not see the bridge, but he could see a line of magueys that marked one of the roadways leading up to it.

He wiped a few grains of sand carefully from his rifle bolt with the tail of his shirt, and then took the clips of cartridges from his waistband, wiped each one with the same minute care, and put them back in his waistband. Lifting the little ladder-like rear leaf sight, he wiped underneath it and carefully lowered it to battle sight again.

About one more hour, Acuna thought. He wished that he could see the bridge and the clearing more distinctly. A good look at the terrain would tell him where to watch for hidden rifle posts. He shrugged his shoulders. This would have to be good enough. Any further movement in daylight would be almost certain to give him away.

He lay back against the sloping palm trunk watching the strips of clearing through the trees. The sky was deep blue and as it darkened a few stars came out. An almost full moon, round and pale as a worn nickel, climbed over the trees down river. "I could do without that," he thought frowning.

He began to make his way forward, moving from bush to bush, on the side where the shadows lay. At the edge of the timber he stopped to listen, ducked under the fronds of an old palm. He tightened his belt in a rapid unthinking movement, holding his rifle sloped under his arm.

The moon was slowly brightening. From forty yards he could see the guard rails of the bridge and little puddles of shadow had become attached to each bush and grass tuft. No one was in sight on the bridge. The road running up to the bridge he could see only in places, strips of pale dust, gray with moonlight, between the dark maguey clumps. There was no movement on the road. He stopped under a banana tree to listen, his head thrust forward a little, his eyes intent. The river made a soft boiling sound on the rocks and frogs were singing in the shallows.

Acuna bent over and blew absent-mindedly on the bolt of his rifle, wiped

it on his shirt. Then he stepped into the clear. He did not run, but went at a wary walk, bent forward a little and zigzagging among the tufts of low brush, his eyes shifting steadily back and forth along the maguey clumps. His rifle was thrust out in front of him at ready, the muzzle slightly lowered, his right hand cupped on the trigger guard.

He caught the faint stir in the maguey, dead in front, and jerked sideways as the thin streak of fire sliced from the dark leaves. The rifle echoed loudly over the river as he fell heavily, face forward in the bunch grass.

TWO men came from behind the maguey. They were both carrying rifles but the stocky, incisive man in front wore the belt and pistol of a Japanese officer. A short dumpy-looking man trailed him respectfully, a little to his left and a yard behind.

"That one got his package," the officer said in a clipped metallic tone. "Right in the belly. With a belly shot they always fall forward. The shock alone will knock a man out for ten or fifteen minutes."

He stumbled and fell sideways himself as the copper-jacketed thirty-caliber slug fired from fifty feet ripped through his left breast pocket. His rifle made a parabola in the air, landing on its butt and toppled over in the path. The man behind him flopped to his hands and knees and then, evidently panicked, started to crawl toward his officer.

"A John," said Sergeant Acuna and shot him through the head. The man's arms buckled under him and his chin slid into the dust of the road. Acuna calmly shifted his rifle and shot the officer again.

He began to crawl through the brush, making a half circle around the maguey. At the bridgehead he dropped to his stomach and stared up the road. Then he started to crawl again making a little scuffing noise on the planking of the bridge. He was moving slowly now with an uneven awkward gait. His left leg trailed a little and at each movement he brought it up carefully, putting his weight on his right knee and his hands. Every few yards, he turned his head to look back at the bridgehead and the road behind it.

"*Alto!*" The challenge came from across the bridge. "*Quien es?*"

"*Amigo,*" said Sergeant Acuna, and then raised his voice. "Hello, Joe!"

"Hello, Joe," called the sentry. "What outfit?"

"Company B. Third Scouts."

"What's the matter with you?"

"One of those———nailed me in the leg."

"Keep your shirt on, Joe," the sentry said. "We're coming out to get you. Any Japs on that bridgehead?"

"None that will bother us for a while," Acuna said.

He looked back at the bridgehead. The two Japanese snipers made small brown bundles at the end of the bridge. Neither one of them moved, and in a little while the dark splotches that spread out beside them on the gravel began to shine thickly in the stone-white glitter of moonlight that slanted in from the Sulu Sea.

The sea was rising now under the urge of the quickening southwester. . . .

A SHIFT OF CARGO

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

MR. ANGEL, the mate, was for abandoning.

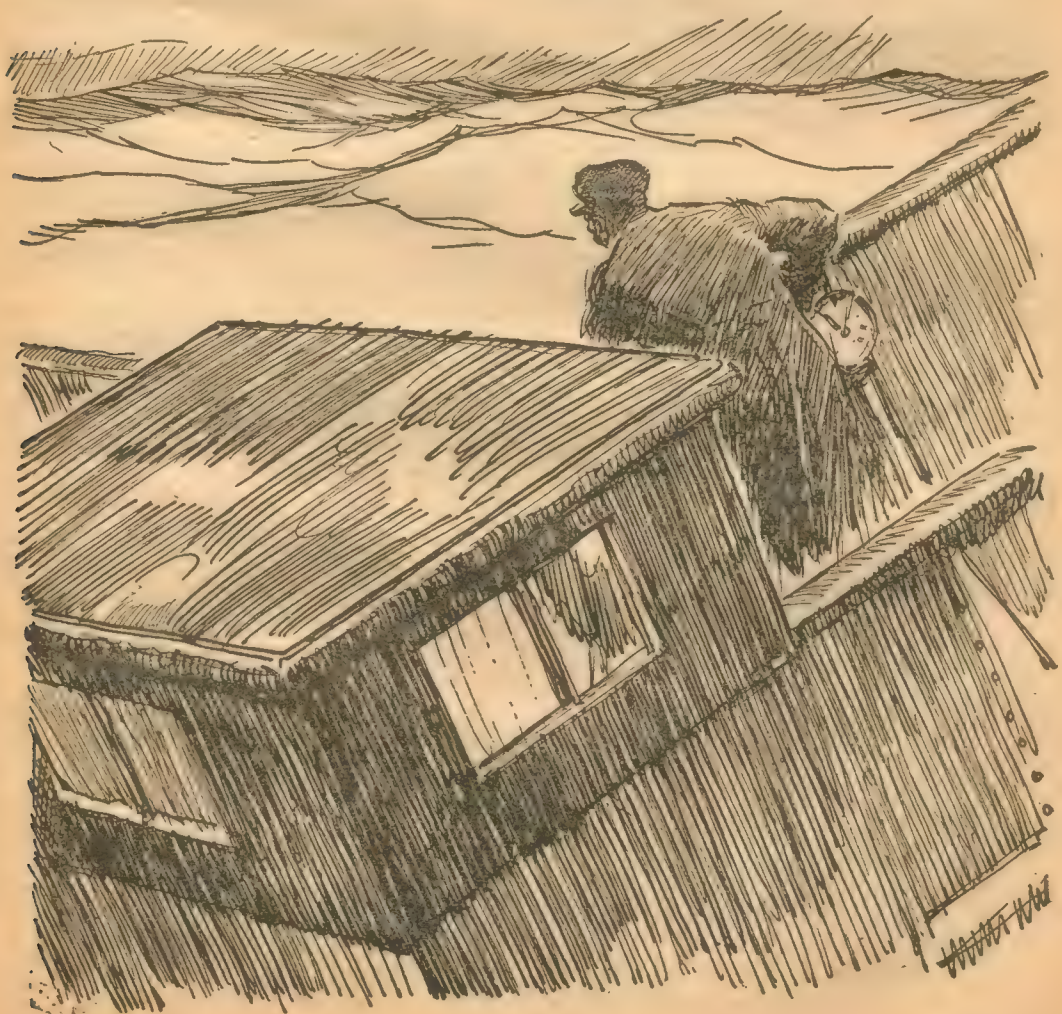
It was all very well for the Old Man, that pigeon-breasted autocrat of the windward bridge-wing, to puff himself up to unbelievable convexities of chest and declare that he would never give up his ship.

That wasn't the question. The ship was giving up Captain Scudder. Anybody with half an eye could see that the list was increasing steadily.

"You don't need an eye, or even a brain, to know she's going," Mr. Angel said to himself. "You can feel her going with your ankles."

He went back to supervising the remnants of the hopeless gang jettisoning what was left of the deck load. The mass of jeeps, peeps, and trucks was tangled along the length of the port well-deck bulwark. They were half in and half out of the lapping seas.

All this work was bunkum, not salvage. The danger to the *Alice Clissold* was deep below her hatches. The stuff down in her lower holds had done more than shift. Sliding, it had hit the port-



. . . . spray leaped inboard and pelted like shot down the open hatches.

side of the *Alice* a crack that had loosened rivets and started plates. Number Four Lower was the worst spot.

"It'd be sure, swift suicide to uncover a hatch in this sea," Mr. Angel reckoned. "For every pound that clumsy, tired bunch could sling out we'd take in a ton of sea water."

The men were worse than exhausted. They were sullen with the conviction that they had been sabotaged in a home port. Their goose had been cooked at a Brooklyn pier, three days to northward on this lonely, unconvoyed run to Puerto Rico. The steam was gone out of them. And they had never had the knack of handling cargo. They were seamen, not stevedores; not for a generation had cargo handling been part of their job. On that slanting, water-logged ship they fumbled with slings, mishandled falls and manhandled winches.

Mr. Angel sang out cheerily, working with them, but he kept close to Olaf, the Norsky, who was grinning to himself like an idiot. Trouble, the mate reckoned, would start with Olaf.

He was right. It was Pollock, a lanky A.B., who suddenly swung around on Olaf with an upraised cargo hook. The curved steel gleamed wickedly.

Mr. Angel kicked the seaman's right foot out from under him. The man went sliding down toward the port scuppers clawing at the plates with hook and fingers.

Olaf glanced around and straightened up his massive body. His small blue eyes in the smallish head atop his imposing shaft-like figure seemed only mildly interested in this attack.

"While you're down there," Mr. Angel said quickly to Pollock, "take this around the axle."

He twitched a line.

The seaman, who had brought up against a half submerged truck body, sullenly reached out a hand for the rope. Nobody else made a move toward the big Norsky.

The moment passed. Mr. Angel's automatic remained inconspicuous in his shoulder holster. The work went on. Olaf's face was still puckered up in an expression of—sort of knowing smugness, like a kid with a secret. Mr. Angel had had a dose of that expression since they had dropped the pilot. Olaf, quartermaster in Mr. Angel's watch, had held that mug for four hours on end behind the wheel. It had sunk like a fishhook into the soul of all hands after the cargo shifted. Olaf knew something; no, by Peter, Olaf had done something about that sabotage. They were sure, now. Some said he was a German. Others claimed he was a Norwegian Nazi.

Olaf was working hard and his shoulders were mighty. Nevertheless he worked with more complete hopelessness than any other man. All hands knew that.

When the last jeep had been dumped overside Mr. Angel tried out the deck with his ankles. "Worse," he told himself.

He put Mr. Locke, the juvenile third mate, to examining Number One and Two hatch covers in detail. They had taken a pounding. He gestured to Olaf to follow him. No use losing any more men, even this Norsky Jonah. He made a weary tour aft. He listened to the carpenter on the latest soundings.

He looked in on the second mate and the three other men pinched and broken during the first two hectic hours after the shift. The Old Man, before he froze up, and the steward had splinted them up and drugged them. Four men! He could use forty.

He heard what the chief had to say about pumps. Everything in the engine-room was now hooked up and throwing water. "Some water," said the chief. "Fires aren't drowned out—yet."

Mr. Angel returned to the wheelhouse. The barometer was going down. He disliked the ragged edges of the clouds. No sign of the sea building up higher. Not yet.

"Not yet," was the guts of this mess. He made up his mind. He left Olaf in the wheelhouse and walked back into the chartroom.

The lead weight was still on the chart table, jammed down to port with the parallel rules and the protractor. Mr. Angel looked at the weight grimly. No chicken, neither was he a sentimentalist.

"Not about a swaybacked old freighthouse with a starboard helm that would make Iron Mike curse," he said. "Or a dumb skipper."

He fingered the weight. "No use kidding yourself, you," he told himself. "You're the only man in her who can stop that crazy old coot on the bridge from sinking all hands, movie style."

He had six good reasons for abandoning. Any rational skipper would listen to them. Increasing list. Pumps not holding water. Short-handed through injuries and exhaustion. Barometer dropping. Boat launching still possible, with a good chance of all hands living to man another ship. And, most important reason of all, the heart was out of them. Olaf's grin had helped there.

That last reason was the one that most surely doomed the ship. The disaster had been scheduled and carried through. They knew it. It was finished and so was their ship. It was time to leave her.

Mr. Angel wiped the sweat from his face.

Deep in him Mr. Angel had a private reason for abandoning. He ached to get back to Brooklyn to see the boss stevedore and the gang foremen who had loaded Number Four hold. Number Four Lower. That was the focus, with Number Five running second.

"I don't have to tell my mate how to straighten her up, do I?" bawled the Old Man.

He wanted to see them again. Joining on short notice, he had had a glimpse of two gang bosses; Gregorio, one was called, and the other was a waddling fat man. They had worked those afterholds. The 'tween deck hatches were already on, then. Mr. Angel felt toward

those two as the most rabid of the crew felt toward the mysterious Norsky. If a charge against them wouldn't stick, Mr. Angel wanted to see them in an alley.

He glanced forward at Olaf, placid in the wheelhouse. Olaf, on his own slow word, had survived two ships bumped out from under him on the North Atlantic and a third one broken in two and overwhelmed in a gale. But it was no superstition that he was a Jonah that had set the men against him; it was that he had hung around the hatches in port and grinned his secret grin at sea. Cargo was no business of a quartermaster.

Mr. Angel's eyes drifted back to the weight on the chart table. This was up to him! He shoved the weight into his pocket.

WARILY Mr. Angel climbed up the slanting bridge to Captain Scudder in his post of command—or was it refuge?—in the shelter cab on the high wing. With crispness he reported the bad news, his own, the carpenter's and the chief's. His hands gripped the weight in his jacket pocket. His heart was beating fast.

The Old Man wasn't taking it in. He was gray. His chest was puffed out, sloping back his shoulders. His pupils gleamed at the mate out of whites crisscrossed with red veins. But even so Mr. Angel would have bet that those eyes were turned inward, upon heroic Captain Scudder. He had no thought left for drab details.

"Straighten her up, mister!" he said with mechanical emphasis.

If Captain Scudder went neck over teakettle down the slant of the bridge and wound up in the lower cab with a knob on his skull nobody would figure it was anything but a fall. And then Mr. Angel could save the ship's company.

The Old Man thrust his stubbly gray jaw out at Mr. Angel. It was a phony, unconvincing gesture.

"I don't have to tell my mate how to straighten her up, do I?" he bawled.

"A good trick if you could do it!" Mr. Angel thought.

This was the moment. But Mr. Angel stood there, paralyzed, with his fingers clammy cold on the weight. He couldn't do it.

Somebody besides this incompetent, frozen old fool was there in the cab with them. It was the stark figure of command, that sea god built up in Mr. Angel's mind in tough years at sea. Now, grotesquely, this invisible figure was a part of this ridiculous fat man whose mind had shrunk away from realities. To save the lives of his fellows, to save his own life, yes, even to get back to those black killers in port, Mr. Angel could not slug him.

He cursed himself for a coward. He turned and skidded down to the wheelhouse. Olaf was waiting for him.

"Soon now she—" Olaf flipped his hand over significantly and let it settle down to his side. He was still smug.

Mr. Angel faced this Norsky. He hadn't broken up the Old Man or even slugged him. All hands were bound to the ship, probably until the sea got too rough for a getaway. Meanwhile Mr. Angel's job was to maintain discipline. And here in front of him was the guy who had done most, with that Mona Lisa smirk, to take the heart out of the crew.

"I ought to have enough in me to break him down," Mr. Angel thought. "It would buck up the other hands."

He blew his whistle and ordered the gang aft. Olaf tailed close behind him, undisturbed, obedient.

In spite of those ragged clouds and the increasing wind the sea was not yet really tough. The respite continued. There was water sloshing around on the after well-deck down by the port rail. It didn't splash up green over the tarpaulins covering Number Four hatch. A dollop or two wouldn't speed her end by much.

"Free that tarp along the high side and get this board up," Mr. Angel commanded, with his foot on the hatch. He slued his eyes toward Olaf. The quartermaster had spent much time in hanging around Number Four.

The Norsky was disturbed. Wrinkles spread across his broad forehead. He moved more slowly than the others to the job.

Scrambling on the slanting steel deck they lifted off the corner hatch cover on the high side, forward. Mr. Angel slung a leg over the edge of the hatch, found precarious foothold on a slanting iron rung of the ladder and spoke to the big quartermaster.

"Follow me, Olaf."

The deckhands close in a little tighter around the aperture. Mr. Angel lowered himself down the rungs. Olaf came slowly along just above him.

DOWN in the 'tween decks Mr. Angel paused. The slosh of aimless water was in his ears. The ship boomed as a sea struck her.

Mr. Angel turned his flashlight beam this way and that. Crated and boxed stuff here, everything from machinery to canned goods for the troops on Puerto Rico. It was not tiered up to the main deck. This stuff had not slid.

Mr. Angel crawled aft a few feet over the creaking crates.

Olaf clutched urgently at his ankle.

"This is all a good stow, sir," he said in his slow, precise English. "It's holding. The shift is in the lower hold."

Mr. Angel kicked loose his ankle impatiently. He twisted around and sat up with his head between two deck beams. He turned his flashlight full on Olaf's broad face. His voice was harsh, probing.

"How d'you know it's all a good stow in the 'tween decks?"

Olaf blinked in the light. "All I can see, sir," he amended. "But below—she'll never come back."

Mr. Angel closed his fingers around the grip of his automatic.

"You know too much about this stow, Olaf," he said. "And you haven't talked enough."

Abruptly he let the light of his torch fall on his leveled gun. "This is war, Olaf," he said. "You're too happy about abandoning. Why? Speak up! Life's cheap in the *Alice* now. Talk!"

Olaf was shocked. He moved his head slowly from side to side, deploring the gun.

"I know they gave us a bad stow in Brooklyn, sir." He licked his lips but spoke no more quickly. "The hatch foremen working the gangs in Four and Five did it. A loose stow. That was easier than they fixed my other ship. They put hundreds of tons of heavy stuff in One and Five and she broke in two on top of a broad swell."

"And what makes you happy about our getting a bad stow?"

Olaf shut his mouth. At last he spoke. "No, I am sorry the stow was bad. That last night I spoke to the inspector on the pier. Only the third mate was in the ship and he is a boy. 'Those two—Gregorio and that fat one—gave a bad stow on my other ship,' I said to this inspector. 'She broke her back.'

"The inspector looked at me and then he called over the boss stevedore, who happened to be there, and spoke to him. The stevedore laughed 'Those two?' he said. 'Gregorio and Pietro handle more tonnage with their men than any four other gangs. You stick to your gangway watch, quartermaster, and leave the loading to me.'

" 'We don't need any squarehead detective on this pier, sailor,' the inspector said. 'All that is taken care of by men who know how.' "

Olaf shrugged his shoulders. "What could I do to make them listen? Who am I?"

Mr. Angel cursed. "So you're happy just because you were right," he said. "It'll make drowning easier, huh?"

Olaf shook his head. Mr. Angel gave him time but he would not speak. He stared at the gun.

The mate tried again. "I think we're on the same side in this war, Olaf," he said. "But I point a gun at you and you hide what you know from me. That is wrong."

Olaf nodded. "Yes. That is wrong." He stared earnestly at what he could see of Mr. Angel's taut face. "You are not soft. Some Americans fight—as if they fought gentlemen. That is worse than not fighting. Listen, then!"

He bent forward. "When I was relieved on gangway watch that night I followed Gregorio and the fat one down here into Number Four 'tween decks. They were laughing. It was enough—How shocked they were when Gregorio's

flashlight happened to fall on me and my handspike. . ."

He hesitated again. Then, "Come," he said. "I show you."

He crawled aft, past the mate. Mr. Angel holstered his gun carefully and wormed on over the crated stuff. Olaf came to a huge packing case that rose above the tiered cases. Around it was strewn the anonymous parts of electrical machinery.

Olaf tapped the case with his fist. "Nailed and wired," he said. "There was no need to bind them and they got tired of calling for help. They will not get out of here."

"What!" said Mr. Angel. "You mean . . . ?"

He listened. Above the noises of the rising sea on the hull and the unending swash of loose water he heard from within the huge case moaning voices venting prayers and entreaty. He stared at Olaf, aghast.

"Yes," said Olaf. "Gregorio and the fat one. He laid a heavy hand on the steel wire that had been renailed on the case. "If, by the luck of fair weather the *Alice* made San Juan I would be punished, sir," he said. "But men would see how they had loaded the lower hold. If the *Alice* sinks now, then these two won't kill more sailors and sink more ships. No!"

He peered anxiously at Mr. Angel. "You are not soft, sir," he said once more. "You would not save two killers of your own men because death isn't nice. I have been fair. I gave them a jug of water and stole food for them from the galley before the hatch was battened down."

MR. ANGEL licked his lips. He edged away from Olaf, a foot or two nearer the hatchway. And then he jerked out his automatic again, pointed it at Olaf.

"Keep your distance!" he warned.

Olaf's face was bad. There was cold Northern fire in his eyes. "So!" he said. "No guts. Softness which will be hard on our side."

"Rip that wire off the case," Mr. Angel said. "Rip it off. Break 'em out o' there!"

Olaf would have spoken.

"That's an order!" Mr. Angel snapped. "Do it—or you won't be able to do it! Break 'em out!"

Olaf's eyes were still hot with rage. "I am not afraid of your gun," he said. He picked up a heavy armature and beat in the corner of the case.

"Gently!" said Mr. Angel. "Easy! I won't have 'em hurt. Get your feet against it and heave. That's it, heave!"

Sullenly Olaf obeyed. Out of the aperture crawled Gregorio. The man's face was gray with fear. As gray as Captain Scudder's. But in spite of his confinement for three days he moved fast. Mr. Angel put a leg on his chest and pinned him against a crate until, under his eyes and gun, the fat one, whimpering, had scrambled clear.

He headed Olaf back toward the hatchway and followed him. Gregorio and Pietro kept crawling toward his ankles over the slanted, groaning cargo. They made the hatchway. Gregorio got a long arm on an iron rung.

Mr. Angel knocked him loose from the ladder with a swipe of his gun.

"How many pieces you figuring on being torn into?" he asked. "The crew's waiting for you."

Gregorio talked, in two languages and with his whole body. But he kept his hand off the ladder. The fat one, beside him, contributed a moaning chorus, though he took time out twice to curse Gregorio.

On the edge of the flashlight's beam, Olaf waited, silent, watchful, with his big hands clenched.

Mr. Angel stood still, feeling the heavy motion of the ship, appraising the drumming of the seas, sniffing at the spray and dollops of water that came down on them through the narrow opening above. Then he stamped, with decision, on the stuff under him.

He cupped his hands. "On deck!" he bellowed. "On deck! Send down a pot of coffee. Fast! Get the covers off the whole starboard side of the hatch. Get 'em off! Move! Get steam on the winches. Steam! Rig cargo clusters!"

Cautiously he sent Olaf ahead of him before he climbed the ladder. He paused only an instant to look at Gregorio and

Pietro. "Hatch foreman," he said aloud. "Hatch foremen! Two of 'em. Don't go 'way." He left the two, heads raised anxiously, near enough the edge of the hatchway shaft to dodge anything thrown from above.

On deck Mr. Angel took a look at the sea. His eyes confirmed his ears. The sea was rising now under the urge of the quickening southwester. Spray leaped inboard and pelted like shot down the hatch to join the water that had come in through her battered plates. Soon it would be more than spray.

It seemed suicide to take off those hatch covers, to expose to the sea the vitals of the ship. But, if Mr. Angel was sure of anything in this world, it was suicide not to take off those covers. Taking 'em off was a more active form of suicide, that was all. Sudden death or none at all, with the odds on.

He explained to the worried Mr. Locke, the third mate, the rig he wanted on the winches. Then he spoke to his gaping deck gang.

"Men," he said, "Olaf's been holding out on us. Olaf smelled the lousy stow they gave us, and Olaf stowed away the two guys responsible for it. That's his secret—that's what his grin's about." He paused to let it sink in.

"Hatch foremen," he said, "two of 'em, the smartest stevedores in the business—and strong men, too, but anxious to get rich. Olaf got 'em both, and the joke's on us—and them."

Some of the men laughed, if you could call it laughing.

HE SPLIT them up, giving some to the boatswain to make a play against those leaking plates with weighted tarpaulins lowered over the side. He lowered the coffee pot and mugs with great care to the two men in the 'tween decks. He borrowed with violent words more men of the blackgang than the chief wanted to lend, and he besought at the same time more pumping of water out of Number Four Lower at whatever cost in other compartments.

He visited the bridge. On the high side, the Old Man was still stonewalling circumstance with a swelling chest and eyes that looked within. A model of seamanlike deportment, a man scared beyond all reason and a millstone around, and a pain in, Mr. Angel's neck. He made the Old Man listen. Angel spoke of keeping her high side, her starboard bow, to the sea with slow turning engines and letting the storm oil tanks flow to quiet the rush of water that already was assailing the slanting bulwarks.

"I don't need any suggestions from you, sir, about maneuvering my ship," the Old Man said, but he did. "Straighten her up, mister! Straighten her up!"

With murder wistful in his heart Mr. Angel hurried back to Number Four. The hatches were off. The men were staring below in an ugly mood. But they were angry, not dispirited. Mr. Angel fought hard to avoid wincing and closing his eyes as a sea lapped in over the lower bulwark. It swashed across the covered side of the hatch and dribbled below. A little more and solid water would have poured into her.

"Sudden death is right," Mr. Angel told himself. He and Olaf climbed down. The cargo fell from one winch, slanting grotesquely, dropped into the hatchway at his signal.

The four of them, Gregorio, the fat one, Olaf and Mr. Angel, got the 'tween deck hatch covers off. The lower hold was exposed, a black, swashing cavern, dreadful to eye and ear.

Against the shaft tunnel, that massive steel passage that ran from engine-room to sternpost, enormous crated machinery, a medium tank and other stuff, had piled up in the shift. This cargo was jammed between tunnel top and 'tween deck beams. It overhung the portside of the ship like a tremendous log jam.

At the bottom of the pit, piled against the portside of the ship, was more heavy stuff. It had battered the steel skin of the ship and now it lay there, inert, holding her down close to her beam ends. Water swirled over it. With the water, dunnage lumber, which should have jammed that cargo into one solid mass, drifted this way and that, with aimless malice.

Gregorio shivered. His black eyes were appalled.

"Not a nice stow," said Mr. Angel. "But down there's your one thin chance of ever seeing the inside of a Federal pen."

Gregorio drew back. "No! It is impossible, *signor!* No man could live—"

Mr. Angel wrenched his arm loose from the ladder and clipped him on the jaw. Gregorio fell, screaming. He had not splashed into the black water before Olaf had the fat one on his way.

"Our turn," said Mr. Angel. He glanced briefly skyward, a mere formality, bawled for light from the cargo clusters and climbed down into the hideous menace of Lower Four. Olaf followed in silence.

ONCE in hell, it was bearable. Just bearable. Mr. Angel was no imaginative man, but after one look he kept his eyes off that wall of cargo overhanging him above the shaft tunnel. It had a way of bulging down at you. He lifted the two chain slings from the hook on the cargo fall.

With curses and blows he and Olaf drove the cowering Gregorio and the fat one into action. The cargo clusters made hell visible. The water was wicked black. They got a cargo sling around a crate—only a small one. The way the two gang bosess moved, when they did move, was slightly reassuring. They knew how to handle that chain sling; they knew where to tackle the crate. Even in Hades, Mr. Angel reflected, what a man has learned in life may help. These guys knew how. They wouldn't kill each other by wrong moves, as would the tyros of the *Alice's* crew. As he signaled with his light for the winch to heave away he suddenly bent under the impact of a blow on the shoulders. It was only water, solid water, from above, but Mr. Angel straightened up again rather slowly. He signaled his winch. Grinding and splintering against the hatchway, the crate ascended.

"Come on! Come on!" Mr. Angel said harshly. "What are we waiting for?"

Floundering, dodging the floating timbers, jumping clear when the jam of cases shifted, they dragged the other cargo sling into action. The cargo fall came clinking down to them again with empty chain sling dangling. That meant that one chunk of cargo that had been holding her over had been given the deep six. One, anyhow. The railroad iron was down below this crated stuff, deep under water.

They worked and splashed and saved their lives and worked again. Once Olaf bent and silently retrieved something that had fallen on a case as the mate bent low. It was Mr. Angel's gun.

"This is all right with me," Olaf said, looking at the toiling prisoners, and handed over the automatic to the mate.

Sudden death was a torturing long time in coming.

Sometimes, as the hours went by, it seemed to Mr. Angel that he could hear the Old Man, topsides, bawling down: "Straighten her up!" And he cursed the Old Man, whether he was hearing him or not, with fury. "Straighten her up!"

A couple of hose lines, like reluctant snakes, came crawling down the hatchway. That would be the chief's work. They buried the lines deep in the water and the hoses sucked and gurgled. Sometimes they made more impolite noises and Mr. Angel or Olaf would clear them.

Once all four stopped. They were too appalled to scream, too frozen to move. The jam of stuff above the cargo tunnel was groaning and moving above them. It was moving, sort of grinding in on itself. They recovered control and fled aft. But the enmeshed machinery ground to some new equilibrium and became silent and still.

Mr. Angel laughed. Then he tried it again. Better. "Well, what are we waiting for?" he asked in his rusty voice and they edged back toward the job.

"Straighten her up!"

If that fat lug said that once more—Mr. Angel remembered the weight in his pocket. It was still there. But he didn't show it to Olaf. That wouldn't be proper.

Those two hatch foremen knew their stuff. Even with their eyes watching Mr. Angel's face, they did the work. Mr. Angel suffered in keeping his face stiff for them. He didn't want to think what might happen if it should break loose from him and mirror his feelings. They whimpered and begged, of course. The

fear of a rat's death was gnawing at these rats. But Mr. Angel was immune to mercy.

The stuff highest against her portside —that stuff they got rid of.

"Up to heaven," Mr. Angel said, watching it go scraping upward, and fought down a giggle. It was a queer place for a guy to feel like laughing. Maybe too queer. He didn't laugh or explain the joke to Olaf. He looked at Olaf. Olaf had gone thin on him. The Norsky was thin.

THE time came when Gregorio tottered backward against the ship's side. After one look the fat one, too, dropped in his tracks. It was no fake this time. They were out.

"We'll look over the material in heav —on deck," Mr. Angel said with difficulty. He called for a cargo net. With a line to steady it they got the two stevedores up somehow.

It was night on deck. Gregorio and the fat one, dumped out of the net, lay flat on deck. Mr. Angel looked at them. They were flat. They looked as if they had been poured on the deck, somehow. But sudden death wouldn't wait forever.

"Dry 'em out and stand 'em up," he said to the steward. "I need 'em working. Don't let anybody hurt 'em."

He looked around for other talent who might do in Lower Four Hell at a pinch. The Old Man was there, saying something. The same old thing. Mr. Angel reached for his weight. This time, by Peter—

Olaf held the mate's hand in his pocket. The Old Man was puzzled.

"No," said Olaf. "What he said was, 'You are straightening her up.'"

"Ing?" said Mr. Angel. "Straighten-*ing?*"

He got up. It was ridiculous, saying a thing like that. The old— He tried out the ship with his ankles. He frowned, deeply perplexed. By Peter— He looked to leeward, down hill. By the light of a half moon he saw that the bulwark showed, free of water. And he remembered, then, that though they had slung much cargo up out of Lower Four the water hadn't gotten any deeper as they worked down to the railroad iron. He looked around and saw the chief. The chief nodded smugly. And the boatswain, beside him, said something about keelhauling a tarpaulin till they could get at the plates inside.

"I've refused assistance," said the Old Man, with a vague gesture to southward. "This little breeze is blowing out. Get on with the job, Mr. Angel. Straighten her up!"

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Angel. "Straighten her up!" He looked at the receding figure of the Old Man.

That old pouter pigeon with the frozen brain had drained Mr. Angel of every bit of wit and muscle and guts and sweat there was in him—him and the rest of the crew, by the looks of them—for the saving of the ship. And the ship was saved, at that.

"So there's a reason even for that looby," he thought and stood up again. It was time to get at the railroad iron.

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The explosions continued as bullets whistled about us and pieces of blazing planes lazily floated down.

BLACK BILLIONS

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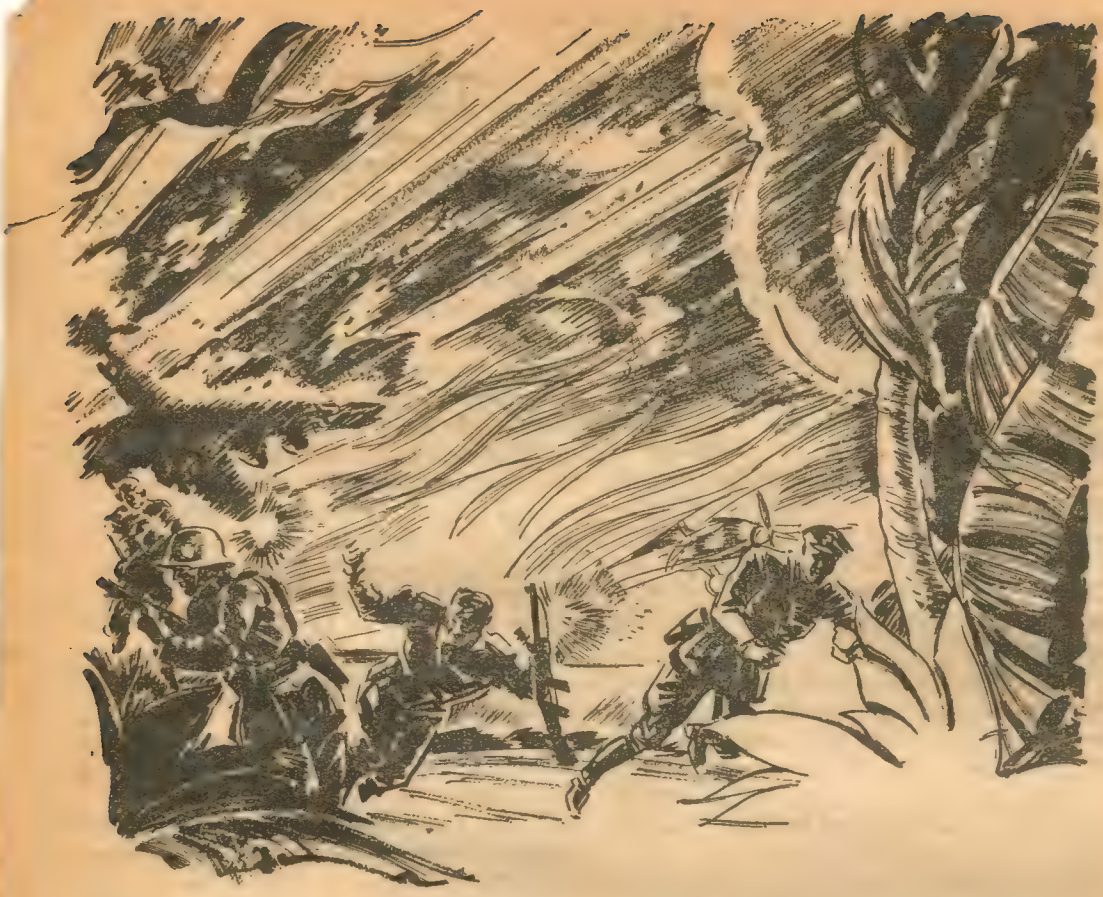

THE plane's missing motors woke me with a start that morning. I ran to the back porch and saw a big two-motored ship flying out of the red dawn with its motors spluttering and roaring by turns. Low, silhouetted against the sunrise, it seemed to be flying right at me as it sought the saddle in the divide. Wings filling the sky, it roared overhead so close that I could see in the algae-covered hull a long shiny scratch that ended in a jagged hole. Then it was over the roof and out of sight.

I ran around the cottage, but the ship was already a blur in the northwest over the still dark jungle. The fading motors picked up for a minute, carrying the plane nearly out of sound, only to fail again. Straining to hear, all I could catch was the faint, startled whisper of a distant band of howler monkeys.

When I turned I saw that the sun was lifting out of the Chiriquí plains, and I could hear different bands of howlers greeting the dawn. Two were within four or five miles and I recognized them as old friends. But the first band, whose terrible roar had been just a whisper, was beyond any that I knew. Somewhere to the northwest across ten or fifteen miles of jungle and over the six-thousand-foot divide that splits the Chiriquí and Bocas del Toro Provinces, some still frightened monkeys were jabbering, and near them I suspected was a wrecked plane.

While I was getting into riding clothes, I told Tomás, who was stirring around in the kitchen, not to bother with breakfast but to saddle my horse instead. I wolfed some cold rice and then, as I mounted, told him I was going down to the Lee ranch to phone about the plane. He nodded and suggested I ask Rodrigues for some eggs if I happened to see him.

The Caldera canyon's first four miles was a typical "dry season road." Now, in the late wet season, it was slippery on the high spots, squidgy in the low ones, criss-crossed and often washed out by many tiny streams.

RIDING, I puzzled over why a pilot would fly a plane with missing motors and a punctured hull into the Bocas bush. I intended to go in and find that plane. Of course that meant going with Tim and Wick. Wick was a sergeant, and Tim a private in the Mountain Artillery, the little 75's that come apart and travel on five mules' backs. I would call the emergency airport near the coast and get them to radio Major W. down at the Canal Zone. I knew the major would be vitally interested in my news, for lately he had been calling on me to do all sorts of odd errands for him. There was, for instance, the case of the accent of a certain archeologist who had drifted in from Costa Rica. The major would, I was hoping, have Wick and Tim fly up this morning.

Tim Saunders and Sergeant Vance Wick, a pair of lean giants, yellow hair and black hair, seasoned bushmen, had drifted into my backyard one day a year ago like smoke on a breeze. I still think Major W. coached them in their attitude and the slightly sarcastic way they looked me over that day. But somehow, for all their army indifference to a mere civilian, we soon hit it off first rate. From then on we teamed up every chance we got. "Vacations" Wick called those ten and fifteen day outings into the bush, and, for me, being a naturalist, "collecting trips," but we found some other queer things besides botanical specimens.

I rode into the upper end of Rodrigues' clearing and saw his hat bobbing about in the middle of the grass. I hailed him and asked if he had any eggs. He shook his head and said something was "*muy malo*" with his chickens. I wasn't surprised. I had warned him before to cut up some almara roots and make them into a mash to keep away the driver ants that will swarm over and kill any penned chickens, but he said he hated the smell worse than the ants.

The road from here to the Lee ranch had ruts as well as holes. Lee was on the porch when I arrived and, while I scraped my boots, I asked him if the phone was working. He said it was, though I had to allow for a bit of fatherly pride. I heard it tinkle once or twice so I knew that the wire wasn't broken, though there was no telling how many wet leaves and damp insulators were sapping the juice along the ten miles to Boquete, and the twenty down the railroad to the airport at David. Lee told me that Prince, his *mozo*, had said he heard a sick plane flying several miles to the north.

Ordinarily I would not have tried to use the phone before the sun dried things out. But I gave a long crank, hoping a couple of tinkles would get through, lifted the receiver, and shouted: "Calling the landing field." A couple of cranks later I heard a faint voice through the buzzing: "This is Frasher; hang up and I will ring for you." I hung up and the bell tinkled. I kept lifting the receiver and got a couple of false alarms. Finally I heard a faint, slurred "Whatchawant?"

"Landing field?" I yelled.

"Yeah."

Then I gave him my message to Major W.—rammed it down his throat a word at a time.

When I sat down and started sipping a tall lemonade that was waiting for me, Lee, from where he was lying in a wicker chair, said: "I'm betting they will be at the field by ten."

"That soon?" I asked in surprise.

"Yes, I think so. Last night on the radio I heard a report that some German airline has been taken over in Ecuador. This must be one of the ships they did not get."

"But there are plenty of places to land an amphibian in Colombia or Venezuela; why fly a gasless plane out over the Panama jungle?"

"You said you saw a hole in the hull. Maybe it was too big to take off with if they landed, or be easily patched. If their landing and repair stations were closed to them to the south they might come up here. I bet they planned to contact some ship over in the Caribbean."

"Maybe." I shook my head, puzzled. I jumped up and put my glass on the table and said: "If they get here before three, we can hit the trail by five."

Lee got up by inches. "It may not rain tomorrow for a change."

I laughed and pointed down the val-

ley to a cloud with a dark skein of rain dripping from it.

A solid downpour struck my cottage just as I got there. Lightning played along the somber clouds above the divide. I occupied what time I could getting everything in readiness for our trek.

"HALOOOO!" That was the stentorian voice of Tim Saunders. It was about four and still dark with rain. I soon made out figures on horseback coming up the trail.

"Where's that blasted Johnny?" This was Wick. "Not content with dragging me out of a nice snooze in barracks, he's got to try to drown me!"

The two big men filled the whole door as they came in. They thumped my back, then threw their wet ponchos and hats on the rack and sprawled in chairs. Their faces were wolf-sharp with delight over the prospect of action.

Instantly Wick took command; it was as if I had physically handed him my burden of doubt and decision. No wonder Major W. picked this man, I thought, with his intelligent eyes and strength like limber steel, for tricky scouting missions. He had a hawk's alertness and a fox's cunning, and his strength and courage flowed into me now.

"Lee thinks we won't come back," Wick said.

Tim laughed. "Lee's been drinking too much of that lemonade his wife makes." Though a bigger man than Wick, towering six feet five, Tim didn't have such craggy features. His was the open face of a good-natured, sometimes boastful boy. He'd been called "baby face" once, but the man who used the name spent a week in the hospital. Tim was keen for the army, happy-go-lucky, and somehow a natural bushman. Too irresponsible for officer material, Wick had taken him in hand and it was sweet to see that team at work. Tim was suddenly serious.

"Lee will let the major know if we're not heard from in five days, and he'll keep his radio tuned to mine."

Tim had a back-pack two-way radio. It weighed around fifteen pounds and could send for about ten miles in a straight line. Even a tree would block off the signal, but it could receive most any short-wave message.

"I see you're packed, Johnny." This was Wick again. "Now give me the dope and we'll get going."

I proceeded to tell my story and the brown faces of both men grew grim.

Minutes later we were swinging up the high trail under our ponchos and packs. A shaft of sunlight sprang down through the black clouds, touching the Caldera gorge with glory. The swish of wet ponchos against the leaves; the squishing sound of the mud sucking our shoes; and the soft slashing of keen-edged machetes alone broke the stillness. We crossed the upper Caldera on a slippery log, and then ploughed upward toward the divide through dwarf palms and giant ferns, with the buttressed trunks of forest giants almost hidden under long bahuca vines.

"The guy must have just made it across." Wick echoed my thoughts. "We'll find the wrecked plane not more than half a mile beyond the pass, because otherwise the howlers that told you of the crash couldn't have been heard." A black snake slithered between green fern stems, its red forked tongue flicking. Drops fell slowly from giant leaves. The tireless legs of the two ahead lifted and fell. When darkness and a root tripped me onto my face, I wryly asked for a halt.

As Tim and I started a fire, Wick faded into the jungle. I knew he was at his favorite game of silent hunting. In time he was back like a shadow, triumphantly holding up a paca, an animal about the size of a small pig.

After we'd stuffed ourselves with paca, roasted to a delicious brown, Tim said: "There might be a lake over in Bocas that this guy was heading for."

"No chance of that!" Wick was decisive. "The army has surveyed this whole country photographically by air, and the plates would have showed up a lake. The whole foothill country over the divide here is one mess of twisted canyons, steep slopes and jungle; no neck of the woods for a plane to try to land."

Bats flicked past the dying flames; a

jaguar "Uh-uh-uhed!" down toward the Caldera; and then I fell into a light sleep, broken occasionally by the nearby *plunk* of large water drops.

A BAND of "ti-tis" or squirrel monkeys led us to the wrecked plane the next morning. The trail beyond the Caldera divide makes you gasp; it is like climbing down a cliff of moss and ferns. Wick stopped us often, while one or the other of us would climb a tree to look around, but the mist of morning was still thick. It was savage wilderness, uninhabited, save for an occasional wandering hunter, for dozens of miles. Crossing the divide one had a distinct sensation of cutting off all connection with the outer world.

We heard the "ti-tis" after we had descended about a thousand feet. They began chattering away in great excitement in the jungle to our left, down toward the gorge of an unknown stream.

"Something over there," said Wick. Off the trail we went into the bush. The virgin jungle on the Pacific side of Panama is astonishingly open, but here on the Atlantic or Caribbean side were interlacing thickets. Quietly we crept under and over the obstructing brush. Then we saw a wing of the plane, jutting up at a crazy angle nearly to the jungle tops with its edge ragged where branches had torn it. Next we caught sight of the "ti-tis" dancing up and down in the branches. Wick lifted his finger and we moved in utter silence. My heart was beating wildly; I had an oppressive feeling of evil, heightened by a slightly fetid smell that began to reach us. When we could at last see the major part of the plane, we were assured that no human beings were near for that shyest of all jungle creatures, the ocelot, was crouched beside the rear fuselage, its tail twitching violently. He was gone in a flash of yellow and black stripes the instant Wick lifted his black thatch above a bush. We stepped out boldly, and the chattering "ti-tis" also fled.

The bodies of two men lay near the plane.

"Native hunters!" growled Tim.

"One is Julio Piti," I said. "I know him; he's from Boquete." The patched clothes of the two hung limply about their still bodies. There were two bullet holes in Julio, one through his chest, the other through his head. The second native's face was twisted with fear; there was a burnt hole in his shirt opposite his heart.

"Don't move about any," cautioned Wick. He walked carefully over to the plane, and looked inside the open cabin door. "Our birds have flown. They must have all lived through the crash. Now let's figure out how these *mozos* died. You, Tim, find their trail in the brush. Johnny, you help me trace the killers." We began to cast around.

"Sing your trail, Tim," Wick called.

"The hunters came up here," Tim answered from down the slope, "probably from a camp by the river. They heard the plane crash and came to give help. They walk hurriedly, cutting their way, not trying to hide. I bet they let out a yell here, because they stopped. I can tell by the heel marks."

"Shoe tracks are too mixed up by the plane," replied Wick, "but here two of our 'friends' came ambling out to answer the calls."

"The hunters see the plane; something scares 'em a little; so they stop for a confab."

"The little Hitlers stop also; they must have been trying to argue the poor *mozos* into coming closer."

"Yeah, they must have given them enough soft soap; probably told them they'd pay big for guiding. These hunters fell for their line, because here they come."

All of us joined forces now even as the hunters had joined the strangers. "They walked them over to the plane," said Wick, "and then they shot them down in cold blood—men that had come to help them."

We stood there silently for a moment, and a cold feeling worked into the pit of my stomach.

"Why did they kill them?" asked Tim.

"They were only natives," I replied bitterly. "Natives aren't human beings to the Nazis."

Wick looked around quietly. "Even natives aren't just killed for nothing. These bozos wanted to hide something."

The cabin of the plane had been stripped. Even the engine had been battered with a hammer until the printing on it was no longer readable.

"Nothing more here," said Wick at last. "Let's go."

THE four men we were following were not bushmen. They stopped often to rest, and their machete marks were ragged. But there was at least one among them who knew what it was all about for their trail was compass-straight. Their tracks soon emerged into the cross-divide trail, and we followed this down to the river crossing by the little palm-thatched shack where the native hunters had been staying. Beyond this two trails led into the lowlands, but at this point the men had first attempted to hide their tracks by running along logs and then had headed into a region of trackless jungle to the west and a little north.

"It's crazy!" said Tim, after the tenth little canyon had been crossed. "Where are they going?"

"A place with a reason," replied Wick. "Look, here's where they camped." Brush lay flattened out, but their fire remains had apparently been buried. A little farther, he said: "They're leaving off the cutting now; trying to hide their trail again." A pair of scarlet and green trogons eyed us from a sun-laced wilderness of bahuca vines. Then faintly we heard the crack of an axe against a tree. Wick stood still and his bronzed face grew puzzled.

"Somebody knows how to use an axe over there," he said. The chopping continued faintly. After a bit we heard a distant tree crash.

"Sounds almost like a native *junta*—gang of tree-fellers," I said.

"It's no *junta*," Wick said slowly. "Spread out and let's scout down that sound. Yell 'Santa Maria!' if they get you." He smiled and shook hands with us both, staying with the trail, while Tim and I faded into the brush on either side. I moved about a hundred yards or so away from Wick, and then, taking out my compass, began to try to parallel his route toward the axe sounds. I dared not use my machete; so I crawled under the brush. I was dripping with a sweat that was not caused entirely by heat.

In time I crossed a large creek and began to climb up the other side of its canyon. I heard only the usual day sounds of the jungle. My hand brushed a fern and came off covered with a thousand tiny seed ticks, small as pin points, and I swore softly. There was not time to stop and pick them off. Now there was a moving black band, two to three yards wide, and I stopped respectfully, for it was made up of the blind driver ants, terrors of the jungle. I had studied such columns before, ten or more miles long, with hundreds of millions of ants. They move only in the shade, hating the sun, but all life in the jungle flees before them. The great, inch-long, white-jawed officer ants were scattered here and there among the smaller black soldiers. I leaped over the band and passed on.

When I finally reached the top of the slope, I found what was apparently the beginning of a plateau, for the jungle floor was flat as far as I could see. An intermittent series of human noises struck me at this point and I immediately crouched among some bushes. I heard axe-strokes, the whir of saws, shouts, tree crashings. The implications caught me absurdly unprepared. I shivered with a combination of excitement and terror. I knew very well that no Americans were camped here. I forgot even the seed ticks, spreading in itching streams over my body. Then catastrophe!

"Santa Maria!" The voice that called this snapped my head up in blank astonishment. It was undoubtedly Wick's and was followed at once by savage gutturals from other men. I could as easily have foreseen the imminent destruction of the world. For Tim to be captured, or myself, that was quite possible, but Wick! I had depended too much on his wily woodsmanship. Yet, noiseless as he was, he must have shown himself to hidden men.

A SUDDEN, savage realization that I must see where Wick was placed as a prisoner roused me from my despair. I began to worm along the ground, cling-

ing to the heaviest undergrowth even though this meant the most scratches. Finally I got to a tree that I suspected might give a view of things. Slowly I climbed, using a bahuca vine as a rope ladder. I was just about to disappear into a mass of foliage when I heard a noise below. A detachment of four soldiers wolfed along with bayonets ready. Their clothes were nondescript, but blond faces and stiff bearing labeled them Germans. They were peering about in the brush for just such as I. One glanced toward my tree, and my body froze motionless, but he only looked about the base and then went on. Higher in the tree I got my first glimpse of the camp. It was a numbing surprise! There were great sheds covered with iron roofs and under them I saw the black wings of planes. Hands shaking, I took out my little telescope and located what I assumed were Messerschmitt fighters and Heinkel bombers. This was big! It had been elaborately planned. Submarines must have brought material and men to a secret harbor on the Panama coast to be shipped inland to this base. There was going to be a sudden savage smash at the Canal and, by the state of frantic activity going on everywhere, that smash would come soon.

I saw Wick being shoved up by four guards in front of a handsome, black-mustached officer at a table under an awning. The officer questioned him curtly for about five minutes, and then my friend, with hands bound tightly behind him but with head up defiantly, was pushed off and locked into a tiny, board-walled, thatched hut.

I climbed cautiously down the tree and bellied off through the brush to the river canyon. My feeling of helplessness increased. The place was swarming with armed Germans and their native henchmen.

Safe at last in a wild part of the canyon I gave our signal, the long, human-like wail of a two-toed sloth. This penetrating cry was answered a few hundred yards away by a similar one. Gradually, cautiously, Tim and I worked toward each other.

He was disheveled, sweating; long red scratches marked him, and about his face there was a look of stark incredulity.

"Did you hear him?" he gasped. "Did you hear Wick?"

"Yes, and I watched them lock him up in a hut up at the camp."

"I couldn't move!" Tim groaned. "Nazis were around me as thick as mosquitoes." His face was suffused with fury. "What the hell can we do to save the guy?"

"This job requires an army, Tim. The set-up here has only one purpose: to wreck the Canal. We've got to get word out to the Major. For the time being, Tim, you're going to forget about Wick and get out to where you can send a message to Lee."

His face fell but, being a good soldier, he realized the need. We shook hands and he melted into the brush leaving me alone. It would take him at least twelve hours in the darkness to get back to the top of the divide.

TIME had passed; the always fantastic gloom of the jungle was deepening. I started up the hill again toward the camp and in the dimness didn't recognize a moving black band. Red hot irons seemed to touch my legs. I clamped my teeth on a scream, and leaped up the slope, brushing furious black ants from my clothes.

A moon broke through dispersing clouds to give me more light and it was an easy matter to sneak up within sight of the camp in the shadows. Gasoline lanterns blazed everywhere; shadows moved jumpily. I heard airplane motors being revved up. Workers were clearing away the brushy camouflage that disguised the secret airfield. Sickeningly I realized then that the attack on the Canal was set for early the following morning. Tim's message would be too late!

Minutes later a fiery stab of pain where my leggings and pants overlapped told me of a missed driver ant. Groaning softly, I killed the little devil, and there and then, in the midst of my bitter disappointment and helplessness, the great idea came. Time was desperately short. I plunged back to the canyon and began furiously to look about for some

almara plants. In the semi-darkness I often stumbled and fell, the itching streams of ticks almost driving me mad. At last I ran upon a small clump of the almara under a *sigua negra* tree. Fortunately there were enough roots, and I dug them up feverishly. I found some water in the hollow of an old stump and there I began to crush the roots into a mash with a stone. The increasing stench made my eyes water. At last I had an ugly, paste-like mixture and this I crammed into my sombrero.

Down the hill I went cautiously until the moonlight showed me the black sheen of the driver ants. I rubbed some of the paste over my boots and experimentally stuck a foot into the column. Waving their antennae, the ants flowed away from it like fire retreating before water. I could hear them clicking their jaws together in distaste and anger. I rubbed all my clothes and my face with the evil-smelling mixture.

The long column of ants was moving from one area in the jungle to another less hunted. The line apparently stretched all along the slope of the canyon. My plan was to break up the column into several parts by sprinkling almara paste across it, turn the ants up toward the plateau. I knelt down and strewed a line of paste across the black band. Thousands of jaws clicked, the six-legged warriors recoiled in heaving waves, but almost immediately they were flowing around my obstruction. I could have wept with frustration.

The ticks by now were imperative in their demand. In defeat I could no longer stand them. Groaning, I crashed down into a little creek in a gully to wash my body. There I forgot my despair! In the gully there was an enormous hollow log and into this the column of ants was streaming. I flashed my light into the log and gasped unbelievingly. Most of the interior was packed solid with ants, clustered together in great black balls, their antennae rippling like grass in the wind. Here were numbers beyond counting. I realized what I had found—the ants' sleeping quarters while on the march. I had heard of such a phenomenon before, but never until now had I seen it.

Eagerly I began the long job of running a solid band of almara paste a foot wide around the lower part of the log and curving it up dozens of yards on each side. At midnight the last of the column had entered the log for sleep. Death lay still in the jungle, but I worked on and on, anxiously watching the sky.

THE first hint of dawn found me ready. Nervously I stuck a long stick into the hollow log and probed slowly around. A murmur of jaws grew to a low, sullen roar; the inconceivable number of ants in that great log were being rudely wakened, their short tempers flaring; they, the masters of the jungle were being disturbed. It is impossible to describe the feeling of rage that rose like a physical thing. Then I saw them! They came pouring out inches deep, black as night, save for the tiny white flashes of officers' jaws. They came hissing like the great swells of a hurricane. I was breathless with terror that they would break across my almara-paste band, but the titanic army recoiled from it, swirling back in fighting eddies, turning with mounting momentum up the slope.

I kept probing and probing until my arm ached. Million on million they came rushing and clicking, the band of paste hurling them upward, wild and crazy with fury, toward the secret German airfield. Forward they flowed, with one purpose, irresistible as a great flood.

Already their work had begun. The Germans must have been just about ready to taxi their planes out onto the field when the first ants struck. At the edge of the plateau I heard screams and the roar of angry men, but the clicking of the ants' jaws, billions of them, was louder than all other sounds; like the mutter of a stormy sea. They attacked everything that moved. The Germans had attempted a stand with kerosene and water, but the ants flooded around them and, when the men realized they might be cut off, they fled. I saw figures running, stumbling, clawing madly at clothes and skin.

I ran to Wick's hut. Two black rivers were flowing around it; little waves were

seeping under the door. I seized an axe and broke the lock with a few blows. Wick was on the table beating ants from his legs with bound hands.

"Wick!" I yelled. "Smear this stuff on your legs." I held up my hat.

"Cut my rope, you blasted fool!" He was the same old Wick. I slashed him free. He grabbed the almara mash and spread it on.

"Wake up, man!" he roared. "We've got work to do." I followed him out of the hut mechanically. My only thought had been to escape. But he seized my arm and ran, dragging me toward the hangars. The sight of a pilot who had tried to climb out of his cockpit too late thrilled me awake. His head had turned into a grinning skull; one arm had been eaten to the bone; the rest of his body was black with fiercely eating ants.

Somehow I found myself furiously at work beside Wick smashing kerosene tins with axes and spreading the liquid over everything that would burn. The high whine of a bullet told of some German who saw our work. A match flashed into life on the seat of Wick's pants and he tossed it into the kerosene. The little flames reached up, slowly grew stronger. We burst open gasoline tanks and the fire soon had a compelling voice of its own; its light suddenly greater than that of the dawn. I saw the black silhouettes of bomb racks hanging from the planes, thousands of pounds of hell meant for the locks at Gatun. The fuselage of a Messerschmitt blazed furiously. Other bullets whistled about us and a red stain spread across Wick's shirt-front.

"Let's go!" We turned and ran, twisting and dodging. The last battalions of the driver ants swarmed in blind rage out of the jungle, rank on myriad rank, to meet a fury greater than their own.

Wick staggered and leaned on my arm, and in this way we made it down into the canyon. We had no sooner flung ourselves to the ground than the deep bellow of an exploding bomb struck our ears. Then the whole top of the earth seemed to come off, and the tree branches lashed across the sky. We clapped hands to ears and watched pieces of blazing planes float down.

I remember cutting a bullet out of Wick's back, but I can recall little more. Tim found us a couple of mornings later, lying by a river bank, too weak to cross.

Days later in the hospital at David, Wick silently handed across a newspaper from his bed to mine. A shaky pencil line outlined the date *December 7th.* Headlines reported the grave losses suffered at Pearl Harbor. It was that Sunday morning that the ants had moved like a carpet of death out of that great log over in Bocas del Toro.

Forward flowed the ants, a living carpet of death.

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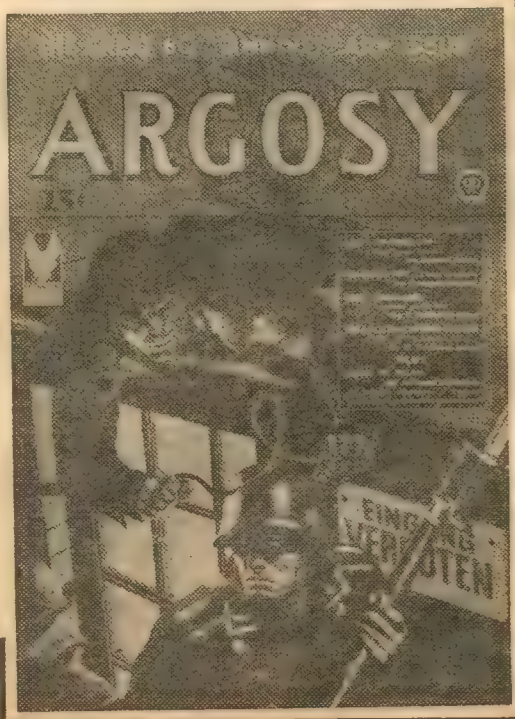

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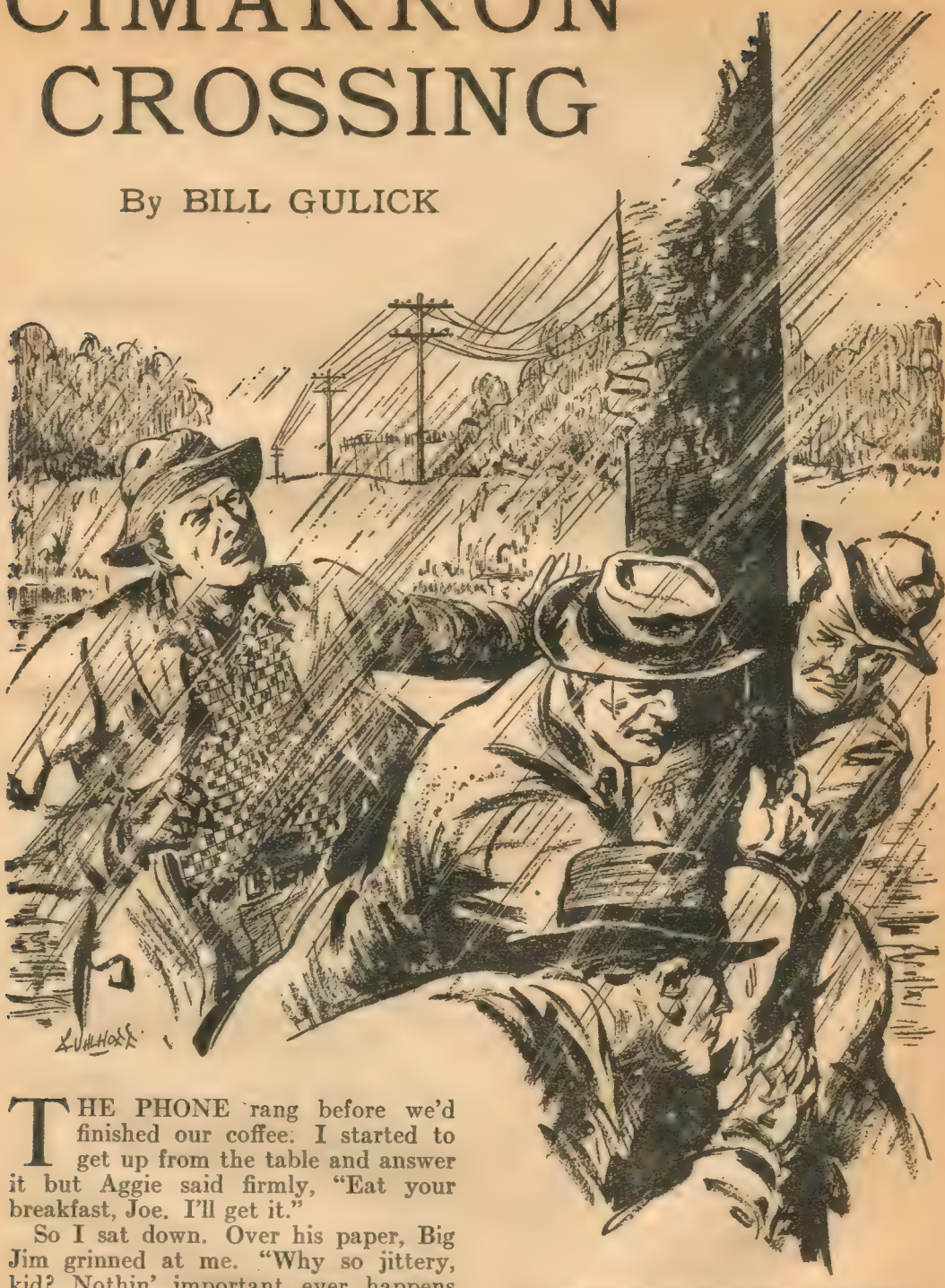


It's no picnic—trying to set an eighty-foot pole in quicksand in the middle of a riverbed.

ILLUSTRATED BY PETER KUHLHOFF

THE PHONE rang before we'd finished our coffee. I started to get up from the table and answer it but Aggie said firmly, "Eat your breakfast, Joe. I'll get it."

So I sat down. Over his paper, Big Jim grinned at me. "Why so jittery, kid? Nothin' important ever happens till after breakfast."

I mumbled that maybe he was right, and went on eating. But it was a strange thing to me that he could sit there so calm and unworried, an easy grin on his leathery, sandstone-colored face and

a lazy slouch to his wide shoulders, when this was the day we were to start on the biggest project Plains States Power & Light Company had undertaken in years. Having been his field clerk and right-hand man for so long, I should have known by now, I guess, that he'd take this job in stride just as he had all the others he'd done in the thirty years he'd been a construction foreman. Still, you don't tack up sixty miles of sixty-six thousand volt lines the way you tack up a barb-wired fence. It seemed to me he ought to be a little on edge.

He didn't even look up from the sporting news when Aggie came back from the phone. "More coffee, Joe?" she asked me. I said no, but Big Jim pushed out his cup for a refill.

"Who was it?"

"The Skipper and Ollie Frieze. They're waiting for you at the storeroom."

"In a hurry?"

"Aren't they always? I said you'd be along in a bit."

He nodded absently, and almost scalded his thumb trying to pick up his cup without taking his eyes off the paper. "Yeah. We'll be along directly."

THE Skipper was drumming his fingernails on the desk-top and Ollie Frieze was impatiently pacing the floor when we got to the storeroom office. "Well," Frieze snapped. "You finally got here."

"Mornin'," Jim said, and sat down and ignored both men while he filled and lighted his pipe. They waited, because they knew you couldn't talk high-line to him till his pipe was fired up. I found a chair in an inconspicuous corner and pretended to busy myself with some material reports, but I kept an eye on the Skipper and Frieze to see which would be the first to jump Jim about the way he planned to run this job.

Ordinarily, it would have been the Skipper's place because he was Construction Superintendent and Big Jim's boss. But he'd known Jim long enough to understand his methods and to know that he didn't like to be pestered. On the other hand, Ollie Frieze, being young and ambitious and full of high-pressure ideas about speed and efficiency, never had sense enough to let Jim alone. He hadn't wanted Jim on the job in the first place; he'd wanted a young man—preferably Breckenridge, hard-driving, new-school foreman whose ideas and methods were like his own. But, being only the engineer who'd drawn the job up, he had been overridden by the Skipper. The Skipper figured Big Jim was the man to build this chunk of highline.

The Skipper stopped drumming on the desk and said, "These gang-pushers you've picked, Jim—I'm wondering if you aren't letting yourself in for unnecessary trouble."

Jim shifted his bulk in the chair. "They're good men—all three."

The Skipper admitted that with a nod. Pete Manders who was to boss the brush-cutting crew, Long John Svenson who was to ramrod the hole-diggers, and Barney Olsen who was to push the wire-stringers, was each tops in his respective job. Yet there was a catch, and the catch was that these three gang-pushers hated one another jealously and enthusiastically. They would stop work to fight any day. The Skipper reminded Jim of this.

Jim laughed and said a scrap every now and then was good for the boys.

Frieze, who had been spreading a mess of blueprints out on a drawing-table, waved his pocket slide-rule at Jim. "Have you looked over these prints?"

"Yes," Jim said. "I took a squint at them."

"Anything that isn't clear?"

Big Jim lumbered to his feet and put a thick finger on one of the prints. "You'll have to change your construction on this river crossing. You got an eighty-foot wood-pole fixture sitting down in the Cimarron bed. Better move it back to solid ground and figure on a steel tower."

Impatient lines puckered up the engineer's small-boned red-skinned face. I knew he had no use for Jim's old-fashioned ideas. From the look on his face as he unsheathed his slide-rule you would have thought the slip-stick was a sword with which he was going to run Jim through.

"Nonsense," he said. Then he scribbled down figures which showed how much cheaper a wood fixture was than a steel tower, how many man-hours would be saved at so much per. He quoted sag-curve equations so fast it sounded like he wasn't talking English. It was easy to see that this was one of those short cuts he'd made his rep on, and that he didn't intend to be scared or talked out of it.

Jim wasn't impressed. "Very pretty," he said. "But how are you going to stick wood poles in that quicksand?"

Frieze was ready for that one. "There's no quicksand in the Cimarron now. Breckenridge and I went over every inch of the pole sites before I drew up a single print."

It was a clincher, all right, and Big Jim didn't have any answer. I watched him walk over to the window and stare out at the men loading up for the day's work. The new ways weren't his ways. He'd learned to build highline back in the days when they didn't teach it out of books in college classrooms. Young men, men like Frieze and Breckenridge, might learn construction by reading books, but not him. It wasn't his style.

He turned away from the window. "Better play safe and make it a steel tower," he said. Then he walked out of the office, big shoulders sagging a little, feet shuffling along. And I got to wondering. When you saw the old ways discarded, when the parade began to pass you by—well, it might make any man resentful.

Frieze must have been thinking the same thing. Turning to the Skipper, he shrugged. "That's an old-timer for you. Thinks his way is the only way."

I caught myself then. Not Jim, though. Not Big Jim.

I GUESS it was because they didn't have any kids of their own that Jim and Aggie were always so good to me. They treated me like I belonged to them. They even made me room and board with them, because, Aggie said, they were afraid I'd starve to death eating in a boarding-house, what with the appetite I had. There was never any danger of starving at Aggie's table. Big Jim liked to have me around, he said, so he would have somebody to talk baseball with of evenings.

But on this job we both kept on the go too much to spend many evenings at home. The sixty miles of new highline was to serve an airplane factory which was being built north of the Cimarron, and we had a deadline to beat which didn't allow of a wasted day or hour. Jim got his crews to rolling with a minimum of fuss and bother. Pete Manders and his brush-cutters gnawed deeper into the heavily timbered hills northwestward toward the river day by day; Long John Svenson's hole-digging gang pushed along at a nice clip; likewise the pole-setters and Barney Olsen's crew of wire-stringers.

We had to run on a hand-to-mouth margin so far as material and tools were concerned, and it kept me humping to make sure everything was on hand when and where it was needed. Many a night I worked till ten o'clock checking and double-checking material orders, and it got to be a sixteen-hour-a-day headache.

Big Jim came into the office one morning and said he wanted me to go for a little drive with him. "I want to look over that river crossing," he told me.

When we reached the Cimarron, I parked the pickup truck on the south bank and we walked out on the dry, sandy bed. The river was wide here, something over a quarter mile, the channel only a narrow trickle of water meandering sluggishly along. Jim had me dig a test hole. At eight feet, the sand was barely damp. I rested while he molded a handful tentatively.

"Deep enough?" I asked.

"Better go a couple more feet. The poles will be set ten."

I sank the hole two more feet and he tried the sand again. It was still the same, firm and dry. Frieze was right, I thought. Setting wood poles here instead of erecting a costly steel tower would mean a big saving—even though the eighty-footers had to be ordered special—and he'd get plenty of credit. He'd see to that.

While we were filling up the hole, Frieze and the young foreman, Brecken-

ridge, drove up and walked across the river bed toward us. Breckenridge was dark and sharp-featured; I didn't like the brittle way he smiled. Frieze waved at us.

Jim didn't answer. Frieze motioned him off to one side and said, "The Skipper and I thought maybe you could use Breckenridge here to help out with the job supervision. As an assistant, of course."

"Isn't the job moving on schedule?" Jim asked bluntly.

"Sure. But we thought—"

"You mean *you* thought. When I can't get the job done, I'll step out and let Breckenridge take over. One foreman is all any highline needs." Jim called to me. "That's good, Joe. Let's go to town and eat."

From the look on Frieze's face when we left him and his hot-shot foreman standing there, I thought he was going to break into a boil. We got in the pickup and I kicked the starter. I took a look at Jim. He yawned and stuck a big foot up on the dash.

"You know, Joe, I wouldn't be surprised to see the Yanks take the pennant again next year. Damned if it don't look like they could go on forever."

WITH three weeks to go till the deadline, that highline was walking cross-country like it had legs. We had our troubles, all right, but Big Jim had a knack for making mole hills out of mountains. Pete Manders and Long John Svenson had a set-to, and for a while it looked like they would forget to work on the job so they could work each other over. Their crews slowed down till they looked like pre-war WPA gangs, and behind them, Barney Olsen's crew slowed to match.

It didn't take Big Jim long to get things humping again. The way he did it was the simplest thing in the world. First, he bought twenty double-bitted axes and gave them to Pete Manders. "Thought maybe your tools were getting dull," he told Pete.

Now if there's a single soft spot in that brush-cutter's black heart, it's his pride in the way he takes care of his tools. He stood and glared at those shining new axes for a full minute; then he stalked off without touching a one of them. But the chips started flying again, and they flew faster than ever before.

To speed up Svenson, Jim put on two extra pole-hauling trucks with orders to crowd past the hole-digging crew and dump the poles on top of the surveyors' stakes. That made it necessary for Svenson to roll the poles aside before he could dig, and scooting those big Black Diamonds around is no fun. A day of it was enough for Long John. He worked his men three hours overtime to catch up with the pole-haulers, and from then on stayed way out ahead.

Barney Olsen was easy. Jim told him that if he had more men he could string more wire. "I'll transfer half a dozen from Svenson's crew to yours tomorrow."

Olsen's cold blue eyes frosted, and I felt the room temperature drop twenty degrees. "We'll string more wire," he snapped. "And we won't need help from any dumb hole-diggers." Then he marched out of the office like a second lieutenant who's been threatened with K.P. duty.

Big Jim grinned at me. "What say we knock off for a beer?"

I grinned back. "I'm ready."

The closer we got to the deadline, the more Jim stayed on the go. Tension took hold of everybody like it always does near the wind-up of a big job; and because this was so big, the jitters spread over the whole company. It got to where you couldn't take a step around the storeroom without stumbling over a big shot.

Frieze was underfoot most every day, and of all the brains that pestered us, he was the worst. He was always consulting the book of formulas he carried in his briefcase and fussing at Jim that this or that wasn't being done as it should. Jim paid him no attention at all.

The autumn rains started in, only gentle sprinkles most of the time, but occasionally pretty heavy downpours. They were what Big Jim feared above all else. "If we get a good gully-washer, that Cimarron bed will be like soft

mush," he told me. "We better set those big sticks right away."

"You can't set them till they get here," I said. "Purchasing has them ordered but they're not scheduled for shipment for two weeks."

He frowned. "Two weeks, hell," he snorted. "We got to have them within a week. Give a memo to Frieze and tell him to build a fire under Purchasing."

I wrote the memo that afternoon and put it in an envelope to give Frieze. If anybody could stir Purchasing up, he could. To give him his due, he had a way of getting things done.

That was on a Monday. Wednesday evening we had a light sprinkle, Thursday another, and the sky stayed overcast during the rest of the week. Jim was worried. Saturday afternoon he had Long John Svenson dig the holes for the river crossing.

"We'll set the big sticks soon as they come in Monday. Then it can rain all it wants."

I CHECKED at the freight office first thing Monday morning, but the poles weren't in. The agent said he had nothing on such a shipment being due. Walking to the storeroom, I cussed Purchasing every step of the way. This would tie Big Jim's plans in knots, and if there came a soaking rain, completion of the line might be held up for months. Jim and Frieze and the Skipper were waiting in the office and I relayed the bad news. The Skipper asked when I'd ordered the poles.

"I gave a memo to Frieze," I told him. "He said he'd take care of it."

Everybody looked at the engineer. His cheeks got bristling red, and he glared at me like I was a stranger he'd never met.

"You didn't give me any memo," he snapped.

I just stood there, dumb. I'd sure enough pulled a bust, and I couldn't have picked a worse time if I'd planned it for a year. I turned to Big Jim, but he didn't look at me, just sat staring down at the back of his hands, not saying anything.

The Skipper grunted, "Hell of a field clerk that can't carry out his foreman's orders."

There wasn't a word I could answer. Not one. Big Jim stood up and shrugged. "Calling names won't do any good now. We'll just have to wait a week—and hope it don't rain."

I sat at my desk and stared at the cluttered pigeon holes till they were gone. I tried to remember about that memo. I thought I had given it to Frieze; I'd have staked my life on it. But I couldn't remember for sure.

The phone rang. It was Aggie, calling to tell me and Jim to be sure and come home for dinner today. "I'm going to have fried chicken, Joe. You two can forget work for once." Somehow, I didn't have the heart to tell her I didn't feel like eating chicken—or anything else.

The work went on that next week just as if everything was the same. On the surface, Jim was the same gruff, short-worded foreman I'd worked with for three years. But we didn't talk baseball anymore. Maybe that was because he was so busy. I didn't think so. Because we didn't knock off for beers together anymore, either.

The rain held off. Friday evening I drove out to the crossing site to look it over. South of where I stood on the river bank, the highline was completed and ready for the juice. Over on the north side of the river, it was ready too. But there was a gap where the river span should be, a long gap. And it seemed to me that the whole weight of the wire which should be in the air now, high up and safe from rain or flood, was bearing down on my shoulders.

Joe, I thought, *you let Big Jim down.*

I got in the pickup and drove back to town. I didn't go to the storeroom to work that night, and I didn't go home to eat supper. I ate a sandwich in a greasy spoon downtown. Maybe it was because I was used to Aggie's cooking. That sandwich was the most tasteless I ever tried to swallow.

THE rain started falling at noon Saturday. It wasn't a gentle rain this time; it was the heavy autumn kind that meant business. Standing at the store-

room window, I watched the streets turn into rivers. I'd just received a shipping notice on the eighty-foot poles. They'd be in Monday. But we wouldn't be able to set them if the rain kept up. And Tuesday was the deadline.

I went home and ate supper just before dark. Aggie told me to walk easy because Jim was asleep and had been asleep since three that afternoon. "He's about done up," she said.

I wanted to go back to the storeroom and work after supper, but Aggie wouldn't let me. She made me sit and talk with her while she sewed. She did most of the talking, telling me about the jobs Jim had done during the last thirty years. She was proud of him, you could see.

She put down the sock she was mending and sighed. "I used to think Jim never got the credit he deserved. One time I told him so. And, Joe, do you know what he said?"

I shook my head.

"He said, 'Aggie, when it's all added up, nobody gets much credit for doing the job he's hired and paid to do. The thing that counts is that it's done, and that's about all anybody ever remembers.'"

I sat there, looking down at the floor, not saying anything. The rain beat on the windows in a monotonous way that made me feel it had been raining always and would never stop. I got up, finally, and said good-night.

"Good-night, Joe."

Sunday was a long dreary day with the rain still coming down. The weather had lightened some by Monday morning, but a fine gray mist still fell. When I went in to breakfast, Big Jim was stirring his coffee and reading the paper. "Mornin', Joe. Have a good night's sleep?" I said yes, and bolted down my breakfast. The poles would be in this morning, I knew. Jim would make an effort to set them, but it would be no go. And, though he hadn't said a word of blame to me, I knew it was my bust that had caused this thing. There wasn't any other way you could figure it.

"What's this rain going to do to the crossing, Jim?" Aggie asked.

He grunted through his toast. "Make it like wet concrete. You'll dig and dig and never find bottom solid enough to hold up a snowshoe." He helped himself to another egg. "Should have planned for a steel tower in the first place."

"Seems like," Aggie said a little nervously, "that you need something to blow all that quicksand out of the river. Maybe a trainload of dynamite would do it."

It wasn't a very good joke, but I laughed just to ease my nerves. Big Jim didn't laugh. He pushed back his chair.

"I'll be damned, Aggie! I'll just be damned!"

She gave him a sharp glance. "Jim, you stop that swearing. You'll be teaching Joe bad habits."

He leaned down and kissed her soundly. "Sorry. Come on, Joe. Let's go to work."

THERE was such a mess of big shots around when we got to the storeroom, it looked like a convention. Only nobody was telling jokes. Frieze was half crazy, nervous as a hungry cat. He'd brought his hot-shot foreman crony, Breckenridge, with him, and kept consulting him, figuring, working his slide rule till I thought it would burn out a bearing.

He made a beeline for Jim, but the Skipper cut him off and said, "What are the chances?"

Jim glanced around at the jittery brass hats and grinned a little. "I think we can set 'em."

"How?" Frieze shouted.

The grin left Jim's face. "Don't know for sure yet. But we'll give it a try."

Frieze must have thought he was stalling, because he blew up. He gave Jim a thumbnail history of Plains States, reminding him of how the company had never yet gone back on its word. He orated on the importance of this job, how much it meant to the company, the state, and the government. If he'd had a flag, I believe he'd have waved it.

Jim took it and never said a word. But the color crept up the back of his neck, and I knew that this time Frieze had gone too far. I was all on edge, waiting for Jim to jump right in the middle of

him. For he had Frieze in a beautiful corner now—I shivered, thinking about it. This wood fixture, understand, had been the engineer's baby; Jim had warned him against it, told him before witnesses that a steel tower would be best. Oh, it was downright beautiful the spot Jim had him in, and I held my breath, waiting.

But when Frieze had run down, Jim just said, "Maybe you know how to set those poles?"

Frieze gestured at Breckenridge. "He can set them. And it won't be by any 'we'll try it and see' method, either. Tell him, Breck."

The room was all ears. If the sharp-faced foreman could do it, it would make him and he knew it. He didn't waste a word. "We'll sink casings, just as if the holes were wells."

"How'll you get the sand out?" Jim snapped.

"Pump it out. I brought a pump with me."

"What'll you use for power?"

"A portable generator. I brought that, too."

"How'll you keep sand from seeping in under your casings?"

Breckenridge answered that one, too. He answered every question Jim shot at him and never stuttered once. I could see looks of approval on the faces of the engineers in the room. The plan would work. There wasn't a flaw.

"How long would it take to do the job this way?" Jim asked.

"About eighteen hours. We could have the poles set and the line hot by tomorrow daylight."

Big Jim looked around the room and shook his head. "Guess none of you bothered to read this morning's paper. There's a six-foot head of water coming down the Cimarron. It'll be here before dark—and more behind it."

The sudden quiet was like you'd clubbed the whole mob with ball bats. I saw Frieze's face sag. He was finished and he knew it. *Now,* I thought, *Jim will put the monkey on his back about the steel tower business.*

He didn't. He just turned to the Skipper and said, "If you're ready, we'll give it a try."

The Skipper nodded. "Let's go."

The whole parade tramped out. When the office was empty, I looked around and noticed Frieze had left his briefcase. *He must have been excited,* I thought. Staring at the brown leather case, my memory began to stir. Suddenly, I knew. I remembered as clearly as if I were seeing it now—giving the memo to Frieze, him penciling something on it, sticking it into the briefcase.

Maybe it was snooping; I didn't care what it was called. I dug into that briefcase. And I found the memo. Still in the envelope, marked *Important* in my handwriting, and a note in Frieze's handwriting to check with Purchasing. He'd even dated the note.

I put the envelope back where I'd found it. I got in the pickup and drove to the river crossing. I had Frieze now, had him where it hurt. He'd be looking for somebody to make a goat of if the poles weren't set. Well, he didn't know it yet, but whether the poles were set or not, he was going to baa plenty.

I'd wait till it was all over, one way or another, and then smear him. Oh, it was perfect. Absolutely perfect.

A LIGHT mist was falling from dead gray skies when I reached the river. Underfoot, the sand was soft and squishy, and it oozed over your shoe-tops when you walked. Olsen and his wire-stringers were reeling out the steel-core aluminum wire for the river span, making ready to sag it in when and if Big Jim got the fixture up. The eighty-foot poles were lying on the sand, inches deep in the brown ooze.

The holes Svenson had dug were filled with a soft, gooey liquid the consistency of a thin milkshake, and nobody bothered trying to bail them out. We just waited to see what Big Jim would do. He motioned to Svenson. "I'll take that dynamite."

I counted the sticks he sank down into the hole. Seven of them. Then he waved for a truck to move in and set a pole on top of the dynamite charge. When the big stick was in, it was down only a few feet, resting on uncertain, jelly-like footing. A lineman scrambled

up it with ropes to guy it off temporarily. When he was in the clear, Big Jim knelt at the detonator.

Frieze caught on then, and came rushing over. "Are you crazy, Jim? You'll blow that stick sky-high."

"Might," Jim grunted, "if my charge ain't right."

He shoved the plunger down. I heard a dull, muffled *whoom*, felt the earth under me quiver with the force of the explosion. I stared at the pole. Instead of a geyser of sand as I had expected, no more than a gallon or so of watery liquid shot up around the pole sides. But the pole was sinking, dropping downward of its own weight into the momentary vacuum which the explosion had created. The slender top quivered, shook as a tall pine shakes to axe strokes at its base, and then became still. And I knew the butt was resting on solid footing now, way down under the quicksand, ten or twelve feet below the surface of the ground.

Big Jim stood up and grunted. "Well, it worked."

When I stopped to think about it afterward, it was the simplest thing in the world. You see, dynamite, when there's any weight on top of it, thrusts down and out. Big Jim figured he could just blow that quicksand out of the way long enough for the pole to sink to firm footing. Once there, it would be as solid as if cemented in place.

Like I say, it was perfectly simple. Too simple for Frieze. He stood and gaped while Big Jim set the other two sticks the same way. But by the time the linemen up in the air were fitting out the poles with dead-end insulators and pulling the wire up to sag, he came out of his stupor. He started beaming and spouting off like he'd done it all himself. He gave Big Jim only one word of credit.

"That's the first time I ever saw a pole blown *into* a hole."

Big Jim grunted. "Hell, son, there's probably lots of things you ain't seen."

I guess that then was when I should have smeared Frieze; I should have told the Skipper to look in the engineer's briefcase when he got back to the storeroom. But, somehow, I kept remembering the way Big Jim had acted when Frieze jumped him this morning. So I let it go.

I walked across the river bed toward the pickup, the sand sloshing in my shoes and the mist damp against my face. Somebody called my name. I stopped and turned around.

Big Jim was breaking away from a group of brass hats, shuffling toward me. "How about bumming a ride to town, Joe?"

I nodded, and we got in the pickup. I drove for five miles or so, neither of us speaking. Finally, he said, "Joe, I'm kind of glad you didn't make any fuss with Frieze over that memo business."

I couldn't keep from saying, "I gave it to him."

Big Jim yawned. "Sure. But guys like him forget sometimes, and there's no sense raising a stink over something like that. He's kind of young and flighty. But he'll outgrow it. Make a good engineer someday." He stuck a big foot up on the dash. "Joe, I been so busy lately I ain't had a beer for a week. What say we take on a couple?"

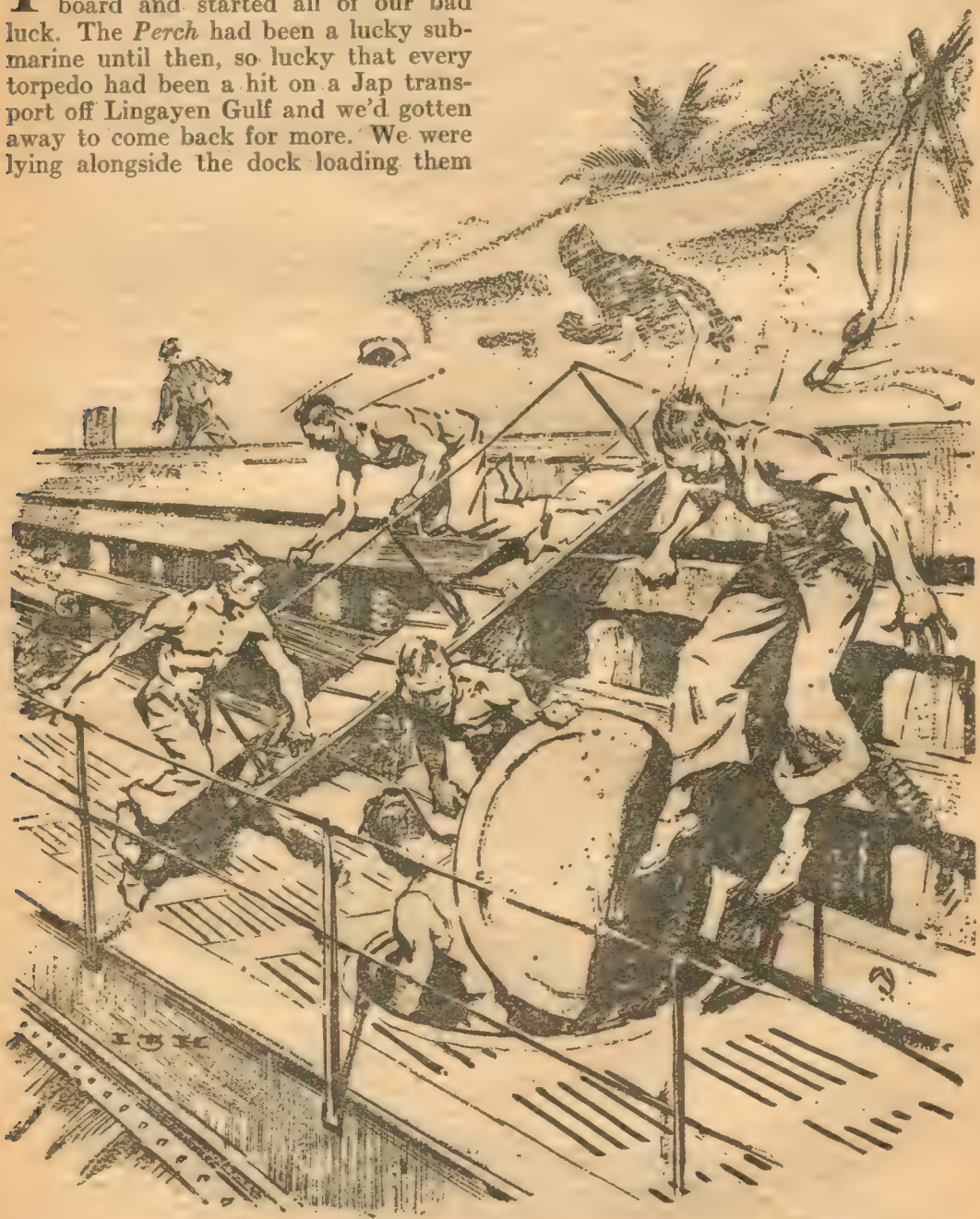
If it hadn't been the road was so slick, I'd have shoved that foot-feed through the floor. As it was, I did kick it a little harder. "I'm ready," I said.

THE CAT AND THE PERCH

By

COMMANDER CHARLES T. S. GLADDEN

IT WAS the bombing of Cavite that brought that damned black cat on board and started all of our bad luck. The *Perch* had been a lucky submarine until then, so lucky that every torpedo had been a hit on a Jap transport off Lingayen Gulf and we'd gotten away to come back for more. We were lying alongside the dock loading them



The torpedo gang fell down the hatches like firemen going to a four-bell alarm and the black demon shot through after them.

ILLUSTRATED
BY
I. B. HAZELTON

when the first bomb dropped and before the dust had laid, all the torpedo gang were falling down the hatches like firemen going to a four-bell alarm. I'd just landed on all fours on the torpedo-room flat when I heard a blood-curdling howl and saw that black demon streaking down the loading skids; he fell on the deck, gave another howl and shot through the torpedo-room door. Nobody gave him any mind at the moment—we were too busy listening to the bombs and praying the Japs wouldn't see our little submarine. It seemed years before the all-clear sounded, then we went up on the topside to see what had happened.

There we got our first piece of bad luck. Lieutenant Miles, our torpedo officer, was lying on the dock, out cold, with a lump on his head the size of your fist. I didn't need any medico to tell me that he wouldn't be sailing with us in the next hour and all of us wondered whom the commodore would send to take his place. Nobody ever dreamed that it would be Ensign Williams, "Little Arthur" we'd nicknamed him when he made a cruise with us as a supernumerary under training. He was supposed to be twenty-one to get his commission in the Reserve, but he didn't look a day over sixteen and didn't act any older. The air of confidence in an officer that a pig-boat sailor's used to seeing just

wasn't in him. Maybe he'd get it with experience, but a sub in war time's a hell of a place for an officer to start learning. One mistake and we'd all be shaking hands with Davy Jones. That's what I was thinking as I led the way down the hatch to report to the skipper, Commander MacGuire.

THE captain's door was open and he was sitting at his desk mopping off the sweat with a towel and studying a chart. I knocked on the bulkhead.

"What do you want?" he barked without looking up.

"Sir, Ensign Williams reporting for duty as torpedo officer," he said.

The captain jumped out of the chair in his surprise. "I asked for a torpedo officer. Why'd they send you?" he demanded.

"Little Arthur" didn't back down an inch. He stood up and looked the skipper straight in the eye. "Because I volunteered, sir," he replied.

Right then my heart swelled with admiration for the kid. I'd have patted him on the back if it had been O.K. for a chief petty officer to do such a thing. But the skipper didn't seem to feel that way. Maybe he was thinking of the job that lay ahead of us. He glared at the ensign like he was trying to scare him away. "I appreciate the honor and admire your nerve," he said, "but we're going out on a dangerous mission and I haven't time to train you. Go back and tell the commodore that I said you won't do."

The kid's face turned red with embarrassment. "I'm sorry, sir, but the commodore told me to tell you that it was me or nobody. You see, the tender got hit and there aren't as many officers as there were."

The captain heaved a deep sigh. "All right, Williams," he said. "Just keep out of the way, don't do anything without first asking Thomas, your chief torpedoman."

That was me he was putting on the spot and right then I decided that Mr. Williams was going to get the right answers and keep out of a jam even if I had to sleep by his side. I saluted him. "Sir, will you excuse me for suggesting that we go forward. We're securing the torpedoes for sea and maybe you'll want to see how it's done."

"Thank you, Thomas," Mr. Williams said and turned to the captain. "I'll do my best, sir—to surprise you."

The captain looked at him sharply. "I'll try not to be surprised at anything you do," he returned.

Mr. Williams saluted and followed me into the torpedo-room where the boys were busy clamping our fish in the racks, giving them the service charge of air and screwing on the war heads.

"Knock off for a few minutes and meet our new torpedo officer, Mr. Williams," I ordered.

The fellows gathered around and I introduced them. There was an evident lack of enthusiasm in the gang and they quickly went back to work. Mr. Williams stepped alongside Pop Dulaney, an old first-class torpedoman, who was born with a grouch, and asked, "Why haven't you affixed the exploder mechanism?"

I was sorry that the kid had asked such a foolish question because I knew Pop would take advantage of the opportunity. "Because it's against safety regulations, and because it's orders that that's the last thing you do before the fish goes in the tube," he said.

I heard a snicker behind me and turned quickly to see who it was, but everybody's face was straight.

Mr. Williams blushed like a girl. "I see," was all he said and turned away.

I was plenty mad. "Pop, what in hell do you mean by talking that way?" I demanded.

"Little Arthur asked me a question and I gave him the correct answer," he growled.

"Sure you did, but how? Ain't you got any feelings?" I asked. Something brushed against my trouser leg and I looked down. It was the cat. He meowed and I picked him up.

Pop looked down his nose at me. "I don't feel like nursing wet ensigns or stray cats," he returned.

"You're so mean a stray cat wouldn't come near you," I said but if I'd known what bad luck was in store for us, I'd have taken it ashore.

IT WASN'T long before the word was passed to take stations for getting underway. I and my gang went up on the topside to tend the lines. We backed out of the slip and cranked up our diesels and headed out of Manila Bay.

This time the usual fishing boats weren't in our way. On our port hand the burning oil tanks on Fisherman's Point laid a smoke screen that blotted out the Navy Yard behind us, the waterfront of Manila was a long sheet of flame, ahead of us was the China Sea, full of hell and the Japs, and with us was Mr. Williams, for whom I knew I'd have to do the thinking instead of him doing it for me. I was as full of troubles as a dog of fleas, but like a dog I'd have been lonesome without them because a pig-boat sailor ain't happy without worries. We were only halfway to Corregidor and out of the bay when they started coming. We heard a plane motor.

"All hands below. Man the machine guns," the skipper ordered. The guns were heavy Brownings, one mounted on each side of the bridge. I took one of them and Pop Dulaney the other; we and the captain were the only people on the bridge.

Pretty soon we spotted the Jap plane. It was in a dive, headed for us with the motor screaming.

"I'll maneuver to avoid the bombs while you keep him off with the guns," the captain said.

I drew a bead on him. He was coming down like a rock. When he filled my ring sight I squeezed the trigger and my gun began to jump. Between bursts I heard Pop's gun chattering away. Down, down the Jap came. I saw him drop two bombs and heard the skipper order, "Right rudder—thirty degrees." The ship started to swing but the bombs grew bigger and bigger and headed right for us.

I was sweating so hard that I had trouble holding onto my guns.

The Jap zoomed up out of his dive while I tried to follow him, but honest to God, all my attention was fixed on those two bombs. One second they seemed close enough to catch, then they plunged into the water not more than fifty feet away. The *Perch* rocked under the explosion that drenched us with water. Then I got my mind back on the Jap plane. He didn't have any more bombs but he was coming back in another dive with his machine guns going full blast.

I started to give him all I had and as he swept across us, out of the side of my eye, I saw Pop on the other side of the bridge. He wasn't at his gun; Mr. Williams had it. He was hardly tall enough to man it and I wondered if he was strong enough, for it's some job to hold onto one of those heavy guns. Just then he pressed the trigger and the gun kicked loose from one of his hands and started spraying around like the nozzle on a loose fire hose. The captain made a grab for him, but not before he'd fired a burst through our periscope shears.

The skipper was so mad I thought he was going to hit the kid. He did give him a good shaking. "Get below before you kill all of us," he shouted.

The Jap must have decided that Little Arthur was enough of a menace for he shoved off. Maybe he'd run out of ammunition, but that's what Pop said, and I didn't feel like disagreeing with him at that time.

THE captain ordered both periscopes run up to inspect the damage. One of them wouldn't run. Bullet holes in the thin tubing had made jagged edges that caused it to stick in the upper bearing. The other periscope had a bullet scar on the barrel. The air was blue when the skipper saw it. Our engineer officer came up and looked at it. "It's almost cut through," he said, "and I'm afraid there may be pin holes through which water'll leak."

That was bad news. We were blind in one eye and the other one was damaged. We didn't have a base to make repairs, our tender had been wrecked, we'd be groping around in the dark with Jap destroyers and planes thick as mosquitoes above us.

"Can't you fill the scar with solder so it won't leak and fog up the lenses?" the captain asked.

"I'll try, but I won't guarantee the job. A jar from depth bombs, or water pressure or vibration might cause it to fall out," the engineer officer replied.

"Do what you can and we'll hope for the best," the skipper returned. He watched every move the repairman made and I didn't blame him for his anxiety. Our mission, our lives, everything depended upon a few drops of solder remaining in place.

When we were far enough out in the bay to be in deep water, the captain pressed the crash dive signal. Everybody in the ship knew by that time about the damaged periscopes, so that when the skipper raised it after we were submerged, everyone who wasn't at diving stations was in the control compartment waiting for the result of the test. Mr. Williams was there too. The captain swung the periscope around and searched the horizon. When he turned away and smiled we knew the patch was tight and the cheer that went up had all our hearts in it. I'm sure the happiest man among us was Mr. Williams. He just beamed joy as he stepped up to the captain and saluted.

"I was going to shoot myself if it had leaked," he said.

"You may still have the chance," the skipper said. "I don't know what effect vibration from the engines or depth bombs will have on it." There wasn't any doubt in my mind that he meant just what he said and when I heard him tell our exec about our mission I knew why he felt that way.

The cat was the only one on board who would have anything to do with. . . .

. . . . Little Arthur, as callow an ensign as ever shipped on a pig-boat.

"The army's expecting the Japs to land in the vicinity of Antimones Bay for a drive up from the south," he said. "They'll cover it with planes from a carrier. Without them General MacArthur thinks he can defeat the attempt, or at least make it costly enough so that he can hold them back until he gets the Philippine Reserves organized. If they're strong enough to sweep up from the south before he's set there just won't be any defense of these islands. It's our job to get that carrier and as many of the transports as we can."

II

THE situation was so urgent that the captain took a chance on the Jap's planes spotting us and made a run for it on the surface all that day. Luck was sure with us for we didn't have to dive. Mr. Williams laid it to the cat that had taken up with him and followed him around like a dog. He was the only one who would have anything to do with it and the critter was the only living thing in the boat that would notice him. Every officer and man just ignored him. He spent the day sitting on the steps in the torpedo-room watching us check our fish, with the cat sleeping in his lap. I sure felt sorry for him, but there wasn't anything I could do or say that would help

his feelings. An enlisted man can't talk that way to an officer.

We made Antimones Bay the next morning at dawn and there weren't any ships in sight so we started patrolling on the surface. Along toward the middle of the afternoon we sighted smoke and headed for it. A wave of excitement passed through the ship and put everybody on their toes.

A pig-boat stalking a ship is the greatest game in the world and the bigger the odds against you the bigger the thrill. That's when you forget the heat that makes the sweat slosh around in your shoes, and the air that's thick enough to eat instead of breathe. The close steel walls that have caged you in for days and days and the gadgets on which you've stumbled and cursed suddenly come alive to your touch. You're proud of them and the way they respond to your will. You know that Davy Jones is expecting you to drop in his lap any second, but you wouldn't trade places with a sailor on the biggest battleship in the world. Those moments are the reason that once you've got the dolphins sewed on your sleeve, you'll wear them till you're too old to do anyhing but retire and raise chickens in San Diego.

Only the skipper and the quartermaster were on the bridge, but those of us below were seeing things through their eyes as they passed the word down to us. I knew the instant the captain was sure it was the convoy, and when the crash dive alarm went off my heart skipped a beat or two and seemed to climb up in my throat. In spite of my experience it always did each time we went under to attack. Mr. Williams was standing by my side. The periscope was housed down in the well and I saw him looking at it. I knew what he was thinking because his face was white as a chart.

The captain came below and gave a quick glance around the control-room and saw Mr. Williams. "We'll soon know whether the vibration has loosened the patch," he said.

The kid was too choked up to say anything and his eyes filled with tears, but the skipper didn't seem to see them, in fact he wasn't seeing anything but the repeater compass on the bulkhead. He studied it for a few moments, then spoke to the helmsman.

"Course 145° speed 4, run at forty-five feet."

I knew what he was doing, running to take a look. There would be destroyers ahead of the convoy, and dozens of cruisers and transports, and the carrier. He had to pick the flat-top out of all those ships, then go through the destroyer screen to get it. It was a desperate task and we needed that periscope. Listening gear wouldn't do us any good for a sound attack, because there'd be too many propeller sounds to tell which was the right one.

Everything was quiet in the boat, everyone was on their toes as the minutes ticked by waiting for the captain to raise the periscope and see if it leaked. He looked at his stop watch and walked over to it.

"Shift to the half switch, speed one knot," he ordered.

It seemed like a year before he pressed a button and the periscope started to slide up out of the well. He crouched down and came up with his eye at the eye-piece. Everyone watched his face and when he smiled and started to rotate the instrument, Mr. Williams staggered over and leaned against a bulkhead. I thought he was going to faint, but soon the color came back in his face.

The captain pressed a button, and the tube started back into the well. "It's tight, so far," he said. "Vibration from running doesn't seem to have hurt it and it didn't leak any moisture from the last dive."

"Thank God," Mr. Williams said and everyone in the boat was thanking Him, too.

My mind didn't stay long on the periscope, the captain saw to that. "There are ten destroyers leading the convoy about five thousand yards ahead of us and an ocean full of transports. I can't make out the carrier. She must be well astern," he announced. "We're going to run down through them. Level off at a hundred feet," he ordered. "Mr. Williams," he called, "go forward with Thomas, and make all tubes ready for firing."

I WAS glad to get away to my job. I showed the youngster how you flooded the tubes from the for'd trim tank so as not to throw the delicate trim of the ship out of balance. Soon the air stopped whistling out of the inboard tube vents and water gurgled instead. Then I opened the outer tube shutters and doors and filled the impulse tanks with air and sat down to wait for the moment when there'd come a click, a rush of air and a slight jar as my fish started down the groove.

It wasn't long before we heard a whiney note; it grew louder. Soon it sounded like an elevated train passing overhead. I saw Mr. Williams looking up.

"That's one of their destroyers," I explained. "We'd sure be a perfect target for his ash cans if he dreamed where we were," I added.

Mr. Williams laughed like he didn't mean it. "The joke's on him," he said.

Pop Dulaney made a bull's eye on the spitkit across the compartment. "This shindig ain't over, and the joke's most likely gonna be on us before it is," he said bluntly.

The loud-speaker crackled and made me jump, then it bleated, "Level off at forty-five feet." The skipper was going to take another look.

The boat took an angle up by the bow and the needle on the depth gauge started back slowly. Mr. Williams watched it, and it wasn't the heat that made the sweat pop out all over his face that was white as a sheet. The black cat came up and climbed in his lap; he didn't even notice him. The boat leveled off at forty-five. Nobody said a word, it was so quiet that I heard the bulkhead clock ticking. I looked at it—one minute, two minutes went by, then the loud-speaker crackled again, "Run at one hundred feet."

Mr. Williams couldn't stand the strain any longer. He got up. "I'm going aft and see how the periscope worked."

He came back with a grin on his face like a gob who's got a warning instead of ten days bread and water. "It's still tight," he announced. "The captain's sighted the carrier," he went on, "it's hull down, and got a destroyer screen around it."

It did me good to see how relieved the kid was but Pop must have had another idea. "Them tin cans mean ash cans on our roof," he said. "I wouldn't give a Philippine peso for that patch when they start popping."

Mr. Williams turned to me. "Are they likely to jar it out?" he asked.

Pop answered, "It took us a day in the Dewey Drydock to tighten up the rivets in our hull after the last ash-can party."

Once more I saw how that haunted look came back on Mr. Williams' face. "Maybe we'll have good luck and not get a real shaking this time," I suggested.

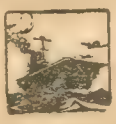
Pop spat again. "Oh yeah, maybe this ain't a war. Maybe I'm dreaming and we're just playing a game."

Mr. Williams got mad. He walked right up and looked Pop in the eye.

"I want you to know that I thoroughly understand the serious consequences of my actions. It was accidental. I thought it was my job to man one of the machine guns and I did my best. I'm sorry for what happened, and I'd give my life to correct it, but I don't want to hear any more about it."

Pop was so surprised that he swallowed his chew and choked. When he stopped coughing, he looked right respectful.

"Aye, aye, sir," he said.



ONCE more we heard the whiney note of the destroyer's props and my heart picked up about ten turns. We were coming on the range, and it wouldn't be long now until there was action and plenty of it. The prop sounds grew louder and louder until the boat was shaking. Then they died down. "Run at fifty," came the order.

Pop and I got up and took our stations on each side of the tubes in case the skipper wanted a quick angle setting. I looked at the clock. The minute hand jumped twice and we were still at periscope depth so we must be pretty near the firing position. I felt the boat shake as the skipper turned on

the juice. The gyro repeater card on the bulkhead started to click. We were turning on the firing course. I forgot about everything else in this world and strained my ears for the loud-speaker. It cracked, "Stand by to fire all tubes, angle setting zero."

We jumped for the impulse stop valves and gave them a quick twist. That put the air up to the firing valve. Pop nodded to me from his side of the ship and I jumped to the loud-speaker. "All tubes ready," I reported.

The boat stopped vibrating as we slowed down for the skipper to take a look. The seconds seemed like hours. My heart was sitting in my throat and pounding in my ears. The gyro repeater card was steady, then it came—a click of the solonoid in the firing valve, the whistle of air, a slight jar as the torpedo broke loose and left the tube. Then the loud-speaker, "Fire one." Another click, "Fire two, fire three, fire four."

My gang sprang into action, closed the tube doors and opened the drain valves. The torpedoes for reloading were hooked on the chain falls. In no time they were swinging on the trolley tracks ready to slide in the tubes when they were dry. But busy as we had been, every man's ears were strained for the muffled sound of explosions to tell us that our torpedoes had found the target. There was one, everybody cheered, then another, two hits out of four was a perfect score because the other two fish had been fired ahead and astern of the target in case it turned.

Mr. Williams was the happiest man I've ever seen. He picked the cat up and hugged him. "Midnight, you sure brought us luck," he said. "I'm going to feed you my share of canned salmon for the rest of your life."

"That mightn't be for long," Pop declared.

"What do you mean?" Mr. Williams asked.

Pop spat in the tube bilges and assumed an air of authority. "In the first place we're going to catch hell for the next hour or so. Ash cans are going to rain like hailstones. If we get by them, you're going to see the Old Man go in for the kill. Two fish ain't enough to sink a carrier. Sure, they'll slow her down, but she can still operate. If that periscope ain't full of water, the skipper'll have to give her another dose of T.N.T."

"Oh," Mr. Williams said. "I thought it was all over."

"You'll see," Pop declared.

Apparently the Japs thought it time to settle the question. The boat shook and there was a dull explosion. Everybody stopped working and listened. The next was closer. I felt the vibration as the captain speeded up. We didn't need anyone to tell us that the Japs were on our trail. Their propellers sounded closer and closer. Everyone sort of set himself for the blow.

There was a deafening crash, the floor plates jumped up and down and added to the racket. All of our lights went out but the emergencies. I looked around for the water that should be coming in. I was still looking when the next depth charge let go; it wasn't quite so close. I took a five-minute lease on life and sat down. My knees were shaking so I couldn't stand up. The next explosion was still further away and I felt sure that the skipper had given them the slip. They'd be back, but that was in the future and a pig-boat sailor doesn't look more'n five minutes ahead, so I stopped worrying.

MR. WILLIAMS came over and sat down beside me.

"That was pretty close," he said.

"Any closer and it wouldn't have been pretty," I answered. "It jarred the filling out of my teeth."

"What do you think it did to the periscope?" he asked.

"We're lucky if it didn't open up more'n the periscope," I answered.

"I bet we're leaving an oil slick as plain as the Saratoga in San Diego Bay, so you don't need to worry about the periscope," Pop declared.

Mr. Williams thought otherwise. "I'm going back to the control compartment and see how it stood up," he said. My fish had been loaded, so I went with him.

The captain was looking at the plotting board.

"All tubes loaded and ready, sir," I reported.

He smiled. "I hope we get to use them." Our slim chance didn't seem to worry him any. I hadn't seen him so happy since Lingayen.

Mr. Williams was terribly anxious. "Do you think the periscope's O.K.?" he asked.

The captain's face turned grim. "It had better be. We're going to make another attack as soon as I can shake those destroyers."

At that instant another depth charge let go, quite a distance away. The captain looked at his stop watch. A minute went by and there was another explosion.

"I'm going to 200 feet, speed up and turn in a large circle. By the time my oil bubbles if any, get to the surface, I hope to be far enough away from the destroyer to take a look and see what the carrier's doing," he announced.

Our lights dimmed as he poured the juice to the motors. Like minute guns, the ash cans kept popping. They came closer and closer until they shook the boat. I hoped that he was guessing right, because if he wasn't, we were running right back down on them and we'd take one on the nose sure as hell. They began to fade and I felt like shaking his hand and thanked God for a skipper like him when the going was tough.

"Shift to the half switch, level off at forty-five feet," he ordered and walked over to the periscope.

I looked at Mr. Williams and it seemed like he was holding his breath. When the ship had slowed down the captain pressed the button and the periscope started up. When it was shoulder-high, he grabbed the handles and started rotating and looking. Mr. Williams was watching him like a hound dog does her only pup. The skipper pressed the button and it slid down.

Mr. Williams couldn't wait for him to speak. "Is it still tight?" he asked. There was prayer in his question.

"Yes," the skipper replied, then he went on, "That destroyer's coming back again, and we've got to give him the slip because the carrier's on a course that'll give me a chance to make another attack."

He turned to me. "We're going to play a trick on him. We're going to let him drop some bombs close to us, then we'll fire a tube full of oil, rags, a few pieces of planking and a couple of life preservers thrown in for good measure. I hope he'll hang around and bomb the decoy while I get away and make my attack. Load one of the after tubes and stand by," he ordered.

III

MR. WILLIAMS and I went back to the after torpedo-room. We pulled out the fish and broke up a desk and threw the pieces in the tube. We slid in a dozen buckets of diesel oil and the life preservers, and closed the door. I was tickled with the trick we were going to play but Mr. Williams was still glum.

"Think that the periscope'll stand another depth-charge attack?" he asked.

"Most likely better than we will," I answered.

We didn't have long to wait. The depth charges started popping again, each one closer. It was a hell of a feeling to be running into them instead of away. I took my station by the tube. One minute I was praying and the next I was cursing the Japs. The ash cans bounced us around, then there came one that knocked me flat on the deck. I hit my head on a valve and saw a million stars. Somewhere in the far distance I heard the firing valve click and a rush of air as the water slug and tube full of trash were fired. I climbed back on my feet and staggered about but I was too nearly out to pay any attention to the other depth charges that popped around us like firecrackers. It was Mr. Williams who brought me back to my senses when he shook me by the arm and said, "We got through it. I wonder if the periscope did?"

"That's the skipper's and your worry," I replied. "Right now, I'm thankful that the *Perch's* got a whole skin."

The depth-charging had stopped and we returned to the control-rooms.

"Pretty close shave, wasn't it, Thom-

as?" the captain greeted me calmly.

"I'd grow a beard like Sampson's before I'd take another like it," I replied.

"We'll soon know whether it worked. Now let's get after that carrier while we have a chance," he said and went over to the plotting-board. In a few minutes we heard depth charges; they seemed a long way off. The skipper laughed and patted the exec on the back. "If he'll just bomb that slick for ten minutes, I'll have that carrier unless he's changed course on me." He shifted back to the half switch and raised the periscope. I could tell by the look on his face that something was mightily wrong. So could Mr. Williams, and he turned white as a sheet. The captain downed the periscope and turned to him. "The periscope's flooded," he declared. "I can't see a damn thing."

Mr. Williams staggered like he'd been hit on the chin. I never saw so much sorrow in one man's face. It suddenly turned him old. "I can't tell you how I feel," he said at last and started forward.

"Mr. Williams!" the captain called sharply. "Don't do anything foolish. Not yet at least. I've still a shot in my locker and if it works, you're forgiven."

The kid's expression changed like the sun suddenly coming out from under a cloud.

"Sir, do you mean that we still have a chance to make the attack?" he asked.

"We do," the skipper said sharply and returned to the plotting-board.

I wasn't the only one who wondered what he meant. How could you be sure of an attack without a periscope? Certainly, you could go in on sound, if you had a lot of information before you started the run, but we didn't. And even on a sound attack you need the periscope right at the end just before you fire, if you want to be sure of a hit.

"The carrier was bearing 270 and on course eighty the last time I saw him," he said. "Shift to the half switch and give me a sound bearing," he ordered.

Sparks twirled his dials for a few moments. "Most of the propeller sounds all around us sound like destroyers, but there's a large ship bearing about 295°," he reported.

"That's the carrier," the captain announced. "Course twenty-five, speed five," he ordered.

So, the skipper was making a sound approach but how was he going to fire without the periscope? That also worried Mr. Williams. "I wouldn't feel like Judas if I knew the captain's plans," he said.

"Only he and God know what's in his mind and right now I'd as soon ask God as him," I replied. At such moments he wasn't one to be questioned.

We slowed for another sound bearing. "She's right on our port beam," Sparks reported.

The captain smiled. "That's perfect. We're on the proper approach course." He went back to the plotting-chart and measured off some distances. "Five minutes should find us firing position," he announced and turned to the exec. "Muster all hands not on diving station in the control-room," he ordered.

IN a few moments everybody had gathered around him. We knew something was coming, and every man's heart pounded in his ears just like mine. His eyes rested on each one of us for an instant.

"I'm going to take a chance and I need every man on his toes," he said. "Both of our periscopes are out, so I'm going to surface until the bridge is awash and use the pelorus instead. I'll be the only one on the topside and when our torpedoes are off I want this boat back at two hundred feet faster than she's ever been before. Everybody'll have to step lively if you want to see sunlight again. That's all. Return to your stations."

So that was all! I don't believe my brain could have stood more. Why every Jap destroyer in the fleet would be on our trail like sharks after a wounded whale.

Mr. Williams also understood the danger of the situation. "It's all my fault," he declared.

"It's no use worrying," Pop advised. "If we get by, nobody'll think about it and we'll all be heroes. If we don't, nobody'll know about it."

Five minutes never passed so slowly, I wanted to get it over with and find

out what Lady Luck had in store for us, and Mr. Williams was so fidgety that he kept pacing up and down the compartment and forgot the cat that followed at his heels.

At last the loudspeaker crackled, "Make all tubes ready for firing." The moment was near. My crew whirled the valves and stood by. "Surface to ten feet," the loudspeaker blared.

The *Perch* came up by the nose and I watched the depth-gauge needle travel back slowly and stop on the mark. I watched the second hand on the clock. Sixty seconds went by. The gyro-repeater clicked, we were turning, then the firing valve jumped off its seat and my first fish left the tube.

"Flood the tubes from the sea," I shouted.

The second, third and fourth torpedoes gave us a good-bye kick, then the *Perch's* nose shot up in the air and our superstructure was above the water; the four tubes couldn't flood fast enough to keep it under. We'd lost eight thousand pounds of weight in the torpedoes and the vents wouldn't allow the water replacing them to enter fast enough to keep control of the boat.

"Flood forward trim," came the order. We obeyed but our nose still hung in the air. We were in plain sight of everything in the Jap fleet and in a hell of a fix. There was a crash like I'd never heard before. The boat shook and I knew we'd been hit. Then something let go right over my head. It deafened me, knocked me down. Before I could get up the bow took a sharp down angle. "Secure for'd trim," I yelled.

Two streams of water poured in the compartment, one from each side of the ship, as our bow went under. We'd been hit and the shell had passed clear through us. I grabbed the interphone. "We're hit in the torpedo-room," I shouted. I felt two heavy explosions and realized that our torpedoes had found the mark but I was too busy to think about them. They'd put the carrier down but it looked like we'd go down too or else we'd have to come up and surrender. That'd mean fish heads and rice for the duration and I didn't fancy that diet.

The captain popped into the compartment and took a quick look around. Already the water was ankle deep and rising fast. "We can't plug those holes. We'll have to surface," he said.

"Sir, how deep's the water here?" Mr. Williams asked.

"About two hundred and fifty feet, why?"

"If we lie on the bottom until the compartment floods, can't we plug the shell holes?" the kid asked.

"Yes, there's a slim chance to plug the holes and pump out the compartment," the captain replied, "but who's going to stay in here while it floods? I wouldn't order anyone to do anything so dangerous."

Mr. Williams saluted. "I'm going to stay," he declared. He'd suddenly grown up, the boyish expression on his face was gone, it was full of self-confidence and determination as he looked the captain in the eye.

The skipper offered his hand. "Good luck to you, young man. I hope I see you soon," he said and started aft.

"All hands abandon this compartment," Mr. Williams ordered. Nobody needed the invitation. Soon there were only the two of us left. "What are you waiting for?" he asked me.

"To give you a hand," I said. "It'll take two of us."

"This is my job. I'm responsible for our fix," he returned.

"We ain't got time to argue," I replied. "There's lots to do."

I CLOSED the door between the torpedo-room and for'd battery compartment. Then I blew all our tubes and closed the doors and put the bilge pumps on the drains so they could pump out the compartment if we got the leaks plugged. By that time the water was up to our knees and the boat had a sharp angle down by the head in spite of for'd trim and the tubes being dry, but our screws were still turning over and I knew that the captain was putting distance between us and the point we'd last been seen.

I was so busy that I had forgotten all about depth charges until one let

go. It wasn't too close, then a regular barrage followed.

"The captain must have given the Japs another tube of bait," Mr. Williams said.

"I hope to God they take it," I declared. "One flooded compartment's going to be just about all we can take care of."

The angle increased and the depth-gauge needle passed the two hundred foot mark.

The water was halfway to our waists. Another fifty feet and we hit bottom and the lights went out. With flashlights

When the captain popped into the compartment, the water was already ankle deep.

we found our way into an upper bunk near the escape hatch and sat down to wait for the water to finish flooding. I'd had plenty of friends trapped in the S-4 and S-51. They hadn't come back to tell me of their experiences and now I thanked God that they hadn't. I felt the water on my feet and pulled them up until I remembered that I was waiting for that water to come up around my ears. Every once in a while the hull would pop like a pistol shot. Each time I jumped and worried about it standing the strain of the two hundred pounds to the square inch for hours. Then the damn Japs started depth-charging us again.

I knew they couldn't hear the *Perch* because we were dead on the bottom, but there was always the chance that they would find our oil slick. And that darkness—it closed in and squeezed like a rock on my chest. The air got thick and foul and made me sick at my stomach. The cat rubbed against me and I jumped and bumped my head on a frame. The pain broke my nerve. "Why'n hell did you ever volunteer to do such a damn fool thing as this?" I demanded.

Mr. Williams put his arm around my shoulders. "Because it's the least I could do under the circumstances," he replied. "I pray God we're equal to the job. There are sixty men depending upon us to bring them back to the sunlight and fresh air. They're on the other side of that bulkhead full of fear and doubt, wondering how we're making out. It's hell on this side, but I believe that I'd rather be here than one of them."

"I guess a man's never too big to be a baby," I said. "Let's get going and see this thing through or butt our brains out trying."

The time to start wasn't far away for the water was up in our laps. The cat's feet got wet and he started to meow. I remembered that the torpedo loading hatch was overhead and near the foot of the bunk so I crawled and felt until I found it and put him up in it where there'd be an air pocket and he'd be safe when the compartment flooded. I never dreamed how this little kindness would be repaid.

IT WASN'T long in moments but it seemed like a year before the water was up around our necks. "It's time to move up into the attic," Mr. Williams said. We clung to the bunks and stabbed around until we found the ladder to the escape hatch then climbed up. It was a squeeze for both of us to find room. We were like two sardines packed in a can and the air in that small cylinder wasn't going to last long. Already I was dizzy and felt sleepy, and my ears hurt so from the pressure that I was nearly crazy.

"Can't we start now?" I begged.

Mr. Williams patted me on the shoulder. "All right, Thomas. You take the hole on the starboard side, I'll take the one on the port."

Before the lights went out, we'd rigged lines from the ladder to bunk stanchions near the holes and put two pillows up in the escape hatch to keep dry. They were made of kapok and would swell up when they got thoroughly wet. The holes were about five inches in diameter and if we could push a pillow most of the way through, it would swell up and stop the leak. I grabbed one and went down the ladder and into the water.

I found the line without trouble and pulled myself along until I rammed the bunk. I worked my way behind it until I hit the hull, then I dove and started hunting for the hole. I was soon as lost as if I'd never been in the compartment. I stayed down until I thought my lungs would burst, then I came up and hit my head on the hull and found myself still under water. I clawed along the framing to amidships where there were a few inches of air above the water and gulped it in.

When I was able to think, I realized that I didn't know where I was or how to go to find my line. I grew desperate and yelled for Mr. Williams. I listened for his answer and heard the cat meow. A sound was never so welcome. I worked my way along in its direction and found the loading hatch. I climbed in it and waited until my nerve came back and then I went for'd and found the skirt on the escape hatch. Once more I followed the line to the bunk.

When I dove this time, I wasn't so nervous and I found the hole. I jammed the pillow in it, braced myself against a bunk and pushed with all my might. It squeezed through and made a good tight fit.

I came up and found the rope and headed back for the hatch. When my nose came out of the water into the thin air-space near the center line, I stopped and rested before I dove down to go up in the escape hatch. Now that the job was done I was tired and sleepy and the bad air was working on me, but I didn't have enough sense to do anything about it. I was drifting off when Mr. Williams grabbed me by the shoulder and pulled me under and over to the ladder and helped me up it. I don't remember him putting a Momsen lung over my head, but the first shot of oxygen that passed into my lungs was like new blood in my veins.

We stood in the hatch like two crows on a treetop in a flood and waited for the water to go down. When it was at the bottom of the hatch we left our roost and found a bunk. That's where we were when the pump lost suction and they opened the torpedo-room door.

The skipper was the first one in. He helped Mr. Williams to his feet while the crew crowded around.

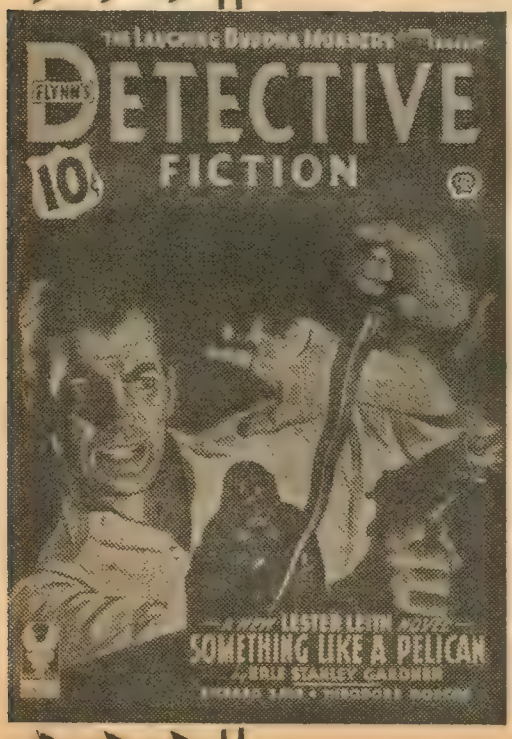
"You and Thomas have done something that'll live forever in the hearts of your countrymen and your shipmates. I'm proud to be one of them," the captain said.

Mr. Williams' face beamed. "I only tried to undo the trouble I'd caused."

"Forget about that," the skipper ordered.

The crew cheered him and even Pop smiled as he sidled up to us. "I want to shake a man's hand," he said. Then I heard him whisper to Williams, "Didn't I tell you they'd forget about it?"

Something brushed my trouser leg. It was the cat. I picked him up. "You're going to eat salmon till you grow scales, and I'm going to paint your picture on both sides of the bridge because you're not the only one who's got nine lives," I said.



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THE INFALLIBLE NOSE OF CORPORAL BLUE

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE WERT

By GEORGE CORY FRANKLIN

THE south door of the Long-H bunkhouse stood as wide open as the valley below the ranch, although it was December seventh. The pleasant scent from fifty fat steers in the feed lot added zest to the tang of the sage-saturated breeze.

Skeeter Welton laid his harmonica on the shelf at the head of his bunk. "Turn on the static, Slim, maybe there'll

The blue mule charged down the hill directly toward the scared Jap.

be some news, it's almost one fifteen."

Slim twirled the dial on the mail-order radio. It snapped, buzzed and stuttered, then came the commentator's familiarly dramatic voice—stone-sober today. "The Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor this morning in the usual blitz fashion." The voice went on to describe how the agents of the Nipponese government had pretended to be working for peace, while their airplane tenders and subs were already well on the way to Hawaii. For more than three weeks we had been at war with Japan and hadn't known it.

Slim Mason leaned forward on the edge of his chair until his weight rested on the balls of his feet, like a bronco poised for a buck. Stuffy Taylor breathed heavily and gave Red Tuttle a questioning glance. Red answered with a nod as he said, "I'm going to town and enlist, maybe there'll be horse cavalry."

Skeeter combed his straw-colored hair

with his fingers, swung his bowed legs off the bunk and took his gun belt from a wooden peg on the wall. "Them damn slant-eyed fish eaters, they're makin' faces at the wrong folks this time." He was the first man to cross the dooryard to Jim Hampton's office and call for his time.

Hampton nodded approvingly. "I know how you feel, Skeeter. I had to ride all night through a snow storm, the time I enlisted in Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders. Your job will be waiting for you when you come back. Give 'em hell."

"Thanks, Boss, we sure will. I wish you'd take good care of my little blue mule. He's all the family I've got."

A catch came in Hampton's voice. Skeeter's affection for the mule colt he had rescued from a snowdrift on the back range, four years before, was a Long-H by-word. "I'll see that Blue has plenty to eat and a warm place to stay. He'll miss you a lot though."

RECRUITING officers gave these tough, bronzed sons of the saddle approving glances. Physical examinations of such men were not ceremonies calculated to inspire wisecracks. "Cowboys accustomed to riding out Arizona sand storms and Montana blizzards make tough soldiers," an officer commented.

Skeeter came with Slim, Stuffy and Red. He was the last candidate to face the officers that day. Even the cowboys who had given him the endearing nickname were shocked at the sight of his torso, ribby as the carcass of a starved cow. Skeeter looked much shorter minus his high-heeled riding boots. He stood, supremely confident, under the level-rod of the graduated scale, while a sergeant drawled the answers to the questions the clerk read from an enlistment blank.

"Name?"

"Charles Osborne Welton."

"Weight?"

"One hundred and fifteen."

"Height?"

"Five feet two."

"Conformation?" The sergeant glanced at the clerk, who grinned back at him. The officers turned to look out the windows. The sight of Skeeter's bowed legs was too much for their dignity.

"Conformation?" repeated the clerk. "Parenthetic."

An officer said, "Sorry Mr. Welton, but your measurements don't quite reach the required standard."

Skeeter's blue eyes turned black. He tried to speak but his throat had become suddenly dry. His right hand flashed to his hip, before he realized that he was naked. "You—you mean I can't go?"

The officer nodded.

Slim, who stood nearest, laid a comforting hand on Skeeter's shoulder. "Take it easy, old brush-splitter, don't swaller your head."

"B-b-but—"

"Yes, I know," Slim went on, "you're tougher than whang leather, and can outride and outshoot any of us, but it's no use tryin' to buck the U. S. Army."

Skeeter turned to the officer again. "I don't pretend to be any great shucks with a gun. Last fall I had to shoot twice at a jack-rabbit on the run, but I ought to be able to do something, if it's only to carry water to the men who can shoot. I seen a picture of a water boy, one time, that won all the chips in the pot, even though he was as brown as saddle leather, and thought his G-string was a uniform."

"You can probably get work in some of the war industries," the officer tried to comfort. "There will undoubtedly be a call soon."

The proposal brought forth a contemptuous snort. "Wouldn't I look swell tryin' to half-hitch a hackamore rope onto the nose of an air buggy, or reachin' for the cinch on a two-ton truck with a spur? No sir, if I ain't a soldier I ain't nothin'. So long."

Skeeter rode gloomily back to the Long-H alone. He had always been able to keep up his end of any work that came along. The men who had seen him grin at death on slippery hillsides, and spur his horse to the front of a stampede, would have liked to see him in action against the Japs. They tried to comfort him by saying so, but their efforts to lighten his sorrow stuck out like a white steer in a Hereford beef

crop, and only rubbed salt in the already smarting wound.

He couldn't bear the disgrace of admitting to Hampton that he had been rejected by the United States Army. He rode into the ranch by the back way, changed his saddle to his own private horse, rolled his blankets and went out to the corral to catch Blue. He was leading the mule through the gate when Hampton stepped out of the hay shed in front of him.

"Where do you think you're heading for?"

"Mexico."

"Not by a damn sight, you don't. Slim telephoned me what happened. I need you more than ever now. Raising beef for the men who do the fighting is going to be just as important as any other work, and it takes a lot more nerve for you to face the jolt you took today, and go on with your work here, than it would to lead a cavalry charge."

Skeeter felt a little comforted, but his desire to fight the Japs still goaded him. "I see what you mean, but it don't fill my nose-bag. I'd like to give something worth while. I know that buyin' War Bonds is all right, and I intend to do that with all my wages"—he laid a rope burned hand over his heart—"but there's a sting here that talk don't help."

Hampton's eyes narrowed speculatively. He was thinking of the day Skeeter, half frozen, had come in with his sheepskin-lined canvas coat wrapped around a mule colt. How he had raised the tiny orphan on a bottle and taught him to do everything but talk. Hampton knew, too, how much a lonely man can love an animal. "Did you know that the government is asking for mules?"

Skeeter gave him a long, steady look. "You mean that I could let Blue take my place?"

"In a way, yes; but let's size it up right." Hampton was using all his tact. "You will be doing the part you are best fitted for, just as much as Slim or Red, and besides that, if you give Blue to the army you will be making a greater sacrifice than any of the others."

Skeeter was thoughtful for several seconds. "I guess you're right, but it sure don't make a pretty bed-time story to tell my grandchildren—that I sent a poor little orphan mule to fight for me."

NEXT DAY Skeeter was back at the recruiting station with Blue. "I brought my family," he told the officers. "If I ain't good enough for your army, I'm goin' to enlist the smartest damn mule in the whole United States."

"Take him to the Quartermaster's Department," a busy officer directed. "They're paying a hundred dollars for sound mules."

"You've got your ear-marks mixed, Walk-a-heap," Skeeter corrected. "Blue ain't for sale. He's takin' my place, and I want a paper like the one Slim and Red got, statin' that in case anything happens to him, I'm to be notified as next of kin."

Gray-haired Major Jackson, veteran of two wars, was standing by the door. He spoke in a low voice to the recruiting officer. "I'll handle this matter." He took Skeeter into another room, and when the cowboy came out a little later, he proudly carried a paper setting forth that Skeeter Welton was donating Blue to the service of his country, as an act of patriotism.

Skeeter put Blue's halter rope in the hands of the only man at the station who understood the workings of the American heart well enough to defy red tape, and accept such a sacrifice with the dignity it deserved. "I don't know whether or not you savvy mules," Skeeter said, "but in case there comes a time when your judgment and Blue's don't hitch, have a look around before you're too sure that you are right. Your eyes sometimes fool you, but a mule's nose—never."

The major nodded. "I'll remember that."

"You see," Skeeter went on, "Blue's mother was a thoroughbred mare, she got away from the band and lived all one summer way up near timberline, with a herd of burros. She got killed in a snowslide and I found her baby. He's the smartest animal on the Long-H." Skeeter warmed to his description. "One day I'm ridin' up Hell Roaring Canyon with Blue followin' me. All of a sudden

the mule stops and cocks one ear toward the cliffs, then flaps his ears, and no amount of coaxin' will get him to go any farther. While I'm arguin' with him, I hear a rumble, and turn myself around in time to see rocks enough to cover a spring herd, slide off that hill. Another thing, you'll have to keep him tied up for a while, if you don't he'll go back to the Long-H. He's been over most of these mountain trails and can follow 'em as easy as a cattle train stays on the rails."

"I know," Major Jackson agreed, "a mule will go back to his home if he gets a chance—everyone knows that."

"You're danged tootin' they will," Skeeter agreed. "One time I traded for a mule that had been raised over on the other side of the main range, and I spent most of my time goin' back after her. If I put her behind a fence she couldn't jump, she'd crawl through a crack." Skeeter held out his hand. "Well, good-bye, old-timer. Don't let any of them Japs play Apache tricks on you. If Blue makes a mistake, just remember he's only a poor little homesick mule, and give him another chance."

The major's eyes were misty as he shook hands with Skeeter. "I'm sure that Blue will be a big help. Thank you for giving him to us." He turned back to the corral, behind the office, leading Blue. The officers who had been unable to see that a pair of bowed legs might be a homely frame for a jewel of patriotism, were disgusted with the major's patient courtesy toward a mere civilian.

AT FIRST Blue missed Skeeter terribly, but he liked the work he was given to do. Cliff Watson, a cowboy recruit from Montana, who had had packing experience, was placed in charge of the string of fifteen mules that were delivering supplies to a detachment guarding an important mountain reservoir. There was no road for trucks or wagons and all the freight had to be packed to the outpost. Because of Blue's intelligence and high spirit, Watson let him lead the string of mules, and facetiously dubbed Skeeter's pet "Corporal Blue."

One trip over the trail to the reservoir camp was all Blue required in order to learn the details of the country, and to find out something about the people who lived there. He liked them, but he hadn't forgotten Skeeter, nor the Long-H. He could tell by the scent the exact spot where the piñons and cedars gave place to the aspens and spruce, and the smells made him homesick. A dozen times a day he leaned back on the lead rope, fastened securely into the pig-tail on Watson's saddle, hoping to feel it give way.

His first opportunity to bolt came when Watson was ordered to stop at a loading-station near a Jap internment camp, and bring down several crates of lettuce for the use of the recruits. Blue had carried a heavy load up the mountain that day, and Watson, willing to give the little mule a break, led him past the loading-platform, untied the beast next to Blue, and started to pack two crates of lettuce on it.

The fact that the halter rope on the second mule was no longer tied to Blue's saddle made a big difference. Now all that stood between him and freedom was the slipknot on the pig-tail loop. One of Blue's peculiar accomplishments was untying ropes. He walked around behind the horse Watson had left standing, and got hold of the end of his own halter rope with his teeth. A quick jerk and Blue was loose. He made the mistake, however, of being too smart. Watson's suspicions had been aroused when he saw the mule put the horse between them, and just as Blue turned away intending to dodge around the loading-platform and make a dash for the trees on the other side of the valley, Watson slipped around in front of the horse, and caught hold of the nose-piece on Blue's halter. "Oh-ho, wise guy," Watson jeered him, "next time I tie you, I'll put an extra half-hitch in the knot."

Blue sighed and looked back at the other mules with such an air of utter innocence that Watson laughed, and patted him on the neck. "You danged little pie-biter, I don't blame you. I'd leave this job right now for a chance to see a good lively cow chase." He led Blue back and tied him securely to the last mule in the string, where he traveled

throughout the remainder of the day.

Major Jackson happened to be near the corrals that evening when Watson arrived. He noticed the way the mules were strung out, and asked why Blue had been demoted to the tail of the string.

"It's because Corporal Blue is homesick, sir," Watson explained. "That mule is sure smart. He came within an ace of outfoxing me today. If I hadn't been watching him, he'd be halfway home by this time."

The major smiled and went up to lay a gentle hand on Blue's head. Blue felt particularly homesick tonight. He rubbed his muzzle against Jackson, trying to coax the major to turn him loose, so that he could leave this country of startling bugle calls, and go back to Skeeter and the happy days on the Long-H. He wouldn't mind being a soldier if they were all like the major and Watson, but no recruit in the camp had any deeper longing for home that day. He wanted to drink from his own special spring—and he would, at the first opportunity.

THAT night Blue stayed around the feed boxes after all the other stock had gone out into the pasture to graze. He watched the sentries pacing back and forth, guarding the camp. To his sense of things, they were put there to head him off if he tried to run away; if they were he knew a way to dodge them. He would wait until that man passed by the spring on the hillside and walked toward the bushes beyond the tent where Major Jackson stayed, then he would make a quick dash, jump the pipe that carried the water from the spring down to the trough, dodge into the brush and escape. It would be easy, if only he could get the gate open. Perhaps Watson might have forgotten to lock the chain. He went over to examine it. No luck. The experience of the afternoon had warned Watson to be on his guard at all times, if he wanted to avoid making a trip to the Long-H, to bring Blue back.

Standing near the gate Blue was now much closer to the spring. He saw a strange shadow creeping down the slope and stopping behind a log on the hillside; but since there was a stiff breeze from the valley toward the hill, he was unable to get more specific information by sniffing the air. Being half horse, his limited range of vision handicapped him.

The stealthy movements of a short, squat man skulking out of the cover afforded by a small bushy tree, were alarming. Any animal would be suspicious of a person who tried to slip up on them under cover of darkness, and Blue was keenly alert for trouble. The instinct that Skeeter had praised to Major Jackson was now working. Blue was nervous and afraid. Just before daybreak he went out to where the other mules grazed, and sought comfort among them; but since they were all domestic animals, bred on the ranches, they possessed none of Blue's wild intuitions, and paid no attention to his fears. They had eaten their oats, drunk from the trough, and now their only interest was to fill up on grass, and then sleep the remainder of the hours until Watson came to drive them into the corral for another day's work.

Blue, however, did not lie down with the others, he roamed about, biting off an occasional mouthful of grass, and then standing with head held high while chewing it. Frequently he stood perfectly still, his ears turned in the direction of the spring, his nostrils spread wide, quivering with anxious responsibility and a desire to go home.

By the time Watson came out to drive the stock in, Blue was as near a nervous wreck as one of his breed ever becomes. He was cross and ugly, snapping viciously at any other animal that came near him. Watson noticed his testiness. "What's the trouble, Corporal?" he asked. "You are sure on the peck this morning."

Blue laid his ears back and snorted a warning to Watson, that told the experienced mule-handler that Blue was in no mood to be trifled with. Watson grinned and opened the corral gate so that the stock could go to the water troughs. Blue was the first one through the opening. This was what he had been waiting for—a chance to bolt, to dodge into the brush and make a break for the

Long-H. He took three quick steps toward the trough then stopped suddenly. He had caught a warning scent and seen an object lying near the spring that had not been there last evening.

The smell came from the vicinity of the log on the hillside, where he had seen the mysterious shadows early last night. The short hair on his neck stiffened and his eyes turned green. He snorted loudly and blocked the trail, so that none of the mules could pass. If they crowded he kicked viciously with both hind feet, and when one attempted to force his way through, Blue sprang at it, snapping his jaws and striking quick menacing blows. Not a single animal was permitted to pass the guard Blue had set up.

Major Jackson heard the milling hoofs and came out of his tent. "What's the matter, Watson?"

"Hanged if I know, sir. Blue has been acting queer ever since yesterday. I laid it to homesickness, but he's lots worse this morning. He acts like he got hold of loco weed. I tried to put a halter on him, but he wouldn't stand for it."

The regimental veterinarian came out of his tent. The major called to him. "What's the matter with this mule? He acts like he's crazy, refuses to let the rest of the stock go near the spring."

"Your diagnosis is correct, sir. That mule is suffering from a nervous breakdown, which in a human being we would call—temporary insanity. Fear of water is a sure symptom. He is a dangerous animal and should be destroyed at once."

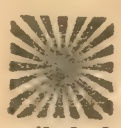
"I can't believe it's as bad as that," protested the major. "What would cause him to be that way?"

"Grief, excitement, fear of something he couldn't understand."

The major remembered the deep affection that existed between Blue and Skeeter. Perhaps homesickness and loneliness had brought on the attack. "Is there anything we can do?"

The veterinarian shook his head. "He might get well if he were turned loose on the range, but he is acting so vicious now that I wouldn't advise anyone to go near him. He would attack a man as quickly as he would an animal. My advice is that you have him shot."

Major Jackson's face sobered. He was trying to find some way to take care of the mule until Skeeter could be sent for, but he was a busy man, and this was war. He spoke to a guard and ordered him to shoot Blue.



BLUE was standing still at the moment, on a direct line between the major and the drinking trough. A magpie sailed down from a fence post, lit on the edge of the trough and dipped its bill into the water. The guard dropped on one knee and cocked his rifle. The major was looking directly at the black spot at the base of Blue's left ear, and dreading the sound of the execution. Suddenly the magpie shot high in the air, swung around crazily and dropped dead.

"Halt!" the major's voice rang out sharply. The guard lowered his gun. Major Jackson walked past him, picked up the bird and examined it. He went around the trough and saw the dead magpie that had caused Blue to refuse to go to the spring. He called to Watson, "Drive all the stock back into the corral. Blue is showing more intelligence than any of the rest of us."

When Blue saw the other mules start back toward the corral he quieted at once, lowered his head and followed meekly after them. The veterinarian went over to the spring, put his face down near the surface of the water and sniffed. Pallor spread over his face. "Great God, Major, there's enough cyanide in this water hole to kill an army."

"But how could a saboteur have passed the sentry?" the major asked.

"Perhaps this will explain, sir." Watson was coming with a long piece of tin tubing. "I found this up on the hill behind that log. It is just the right length to reach from the log to the spring. A man might have sneaked down the hill under cover of the brush, and by jarring the tin tube with his hand he could have run the cyanide crystals down into the spring."

"Are there any tracks above the log?"

"Yes sir, plenty of them, and they were not made by army boots."

Major Jackson ordered the guard to warn the camp to use no water from the spring, under any circumstances. He

then went up the hillside a short distance to where he had seen a rag hanging on a thorn bush. He thought it might have been used as a signal, but found it to be part of a shirt that had been torn from a man's body.

Watson and an orderly followed the major up the hill and past the log where Blue had seen the shadow moving just before daylight. Blue had gone into the corral with the rest of the stock. He had expected Watson to shut the gate behind him, but the packer was too much interested in tracing man-tracks, to be thinking about mules.

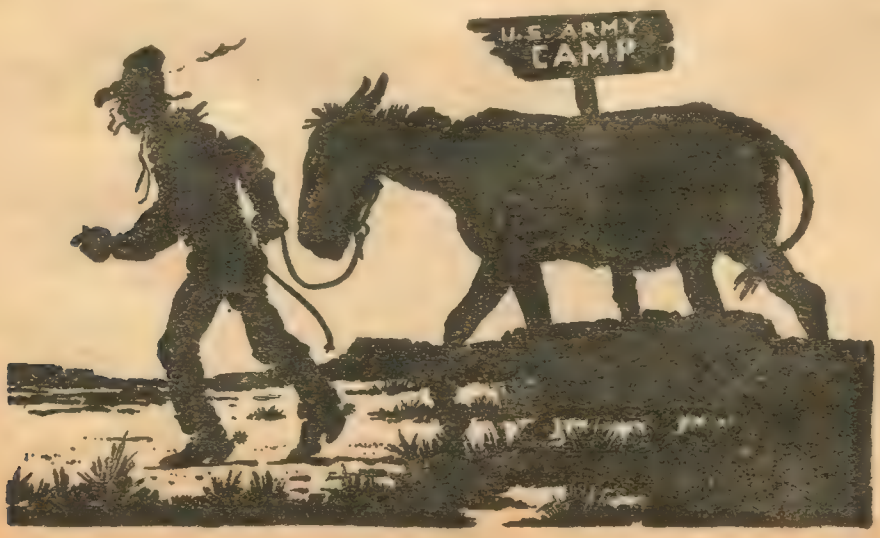
Blue decided to take a chance on slipping past Watson. After all the packer had no horse now, and Blue knew he could outrun any man. Besides the Long-H lay in that direction, and the little mule wanted to make every step count. He walked rapidly up the hill, keeping about fifty yards to the north of where he had seen Watson disappear over the ridge. He stopped on top and oriented himself. Half a mile to the west was the trail he had come over with Skeeter. He started down into the willow thicket. Watson and the others were only a short distance to the left. Blue knew exactly where they were. He saw his chance to make a quick dash for liberty, totally ignorant that he was running directly for the spot where the Jap who had poisoned the spring had taken refuge under an overhanging willow.

When the badly scared Jap saw the blue mule charging down the hill directly toward him, he went into a panic.

Blue heard Watson yell at him, then he saw the Jap crouched beside a willow bush, a stubby automatic pointed at him. Blue was no stranger to firearms. Skeeter had taught him long ago that the noise made by a gun could not hurt him. He saw flashes of fire and felt the sting of bullets, but the staccato barking of the automatic was no more to him than the buzzing of a greenhead fly.

The terrified Jap dropped the empty weapon and dodged to the other side of the bush, but Blue was not going to lose his advantage because of a few willow twigs. He crushed the brush beneath him, frightened the Jap out into the open. The orderly, who had followed the major, topped the ridge. He raised his rifle, let the front sight follow through for a short lead, and touched the trigger. The Jap threw both hands high, clutching at nothing, and fell so hard that his body bounced off the ground.

Blue dodged sharply to the left. Homesickness now had more power over him than fear. He saw that the men were fifty yards away and afoot. Here, at last, was the chance to escape he had dared death to gain. He turned abruptly to the left to the nearest brush patch. Two minutes later Corporal Blue was trotting along a trail through the heavy timber, headed for home—A W O L.

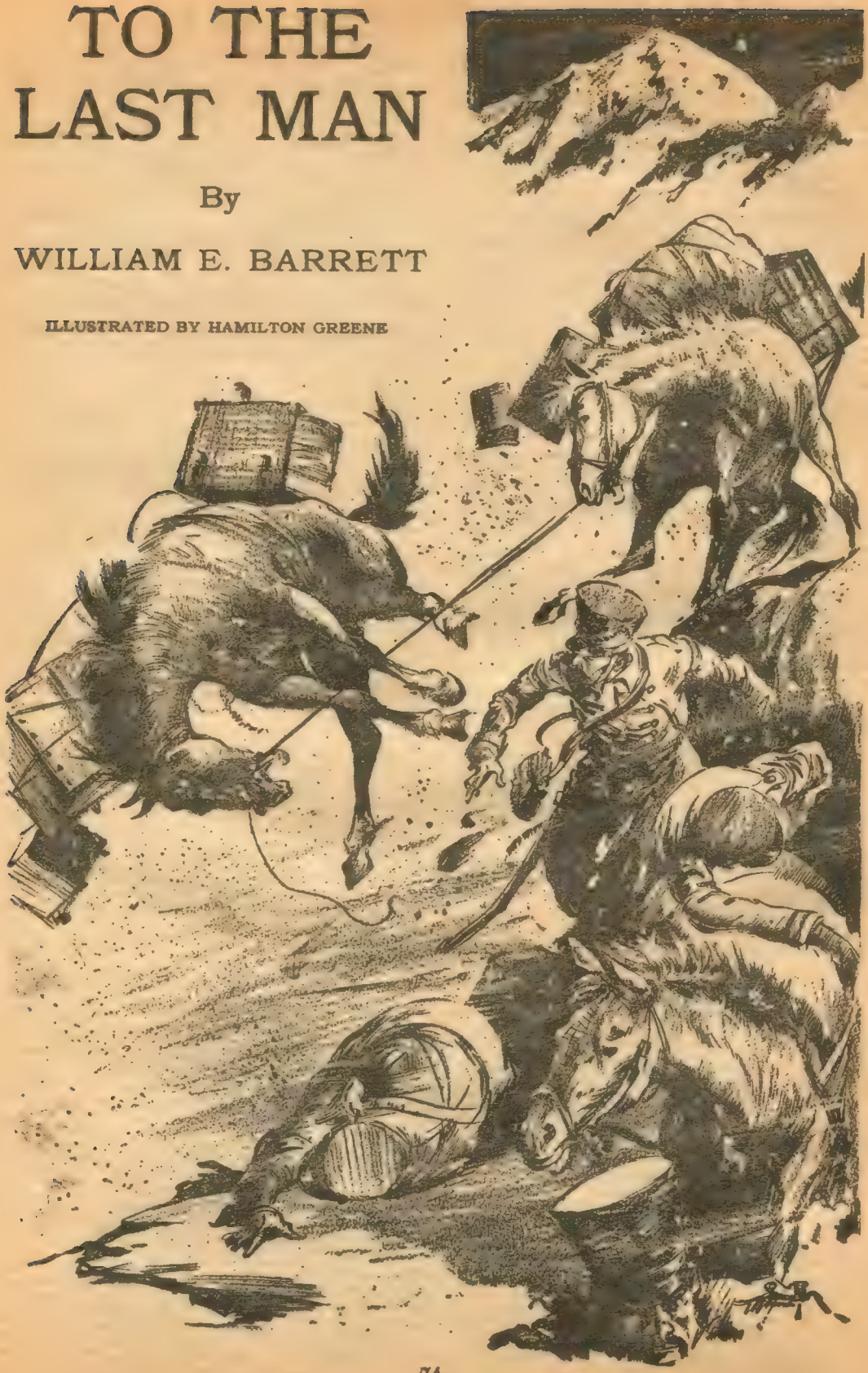


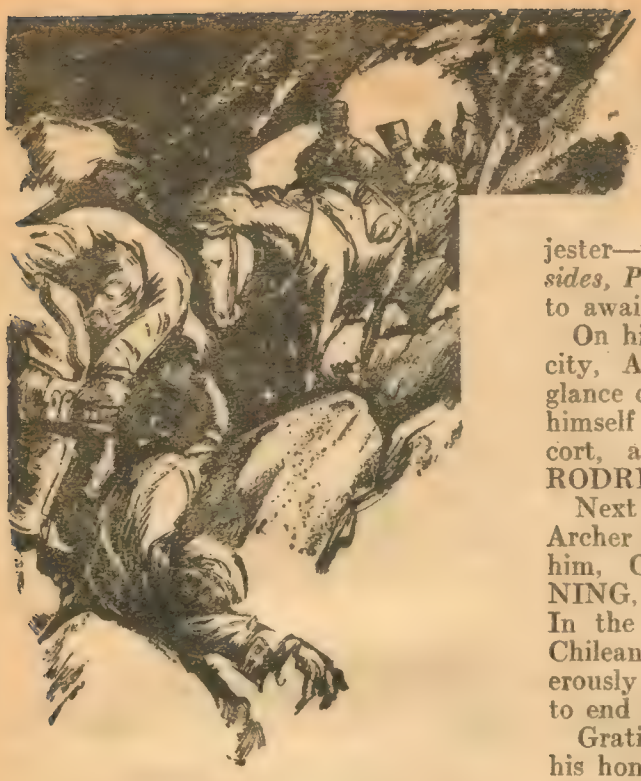
TO THE LAST MAN

By

WILLIAM E. BARRETT

ILLUSTRATED BY HAMILTON GREENE





Men fell down the faces of the cliffs and the next minute were as forgotten as the pack animals that fell with them. . . . Such was the Paso del Diablo.

CONCLUSION

Synopsis

THE year is 1816; the place South America—where CRAIG ARCHER, one-time Captain of Cavalry in the U.S. Army, has gone to answer the ringing challenge of *Freedom for Chile!* At the behest of MIGUEL CARRERA, who claims leadership of the Chilean patriots, Archer—with his aide, MAJOR BLACKWELL—has recruited a company of 150 hardened American fighting men. But not until they reach Buenos Aires, where they are to be equipped, does Archer learn the dubious nature of the Chileno's position. Since the Battle of Rancagua, which had resulted in disaster for the cause of Chilean independence, Carrera's leadership has been repudiated by BERNARDO O'HIGGINS, half-Irish half-Chilean patriot, who has placed in command of the exiled Chilean Army an Argentine, JOSE FRANCISCO DE SAN MARTIN. Archer and his men are only pawns in Carrera's game of power politics.

Archer, unskilled in intrigue, reaches for his lucky piece—a gold medal engraved with the grinning figure of a jester—reads the inscription, *I have two sides, Power has only one,* and decides to await the turn of events.

On his first evening in the Argentine city, Archer returns the provocative glance of a lovely señorita, only to find himself challenged to a duel by her escort, a Chilean colonel — MANUEL RODRIGUEZ ARDOIZA.

Next morning, at the duelling place, Archer finds a tall Englishman awaiting him, COLONEL HERBERT DANNING, who offers his services as second. In the ensuing duel, Archer gets the Chilean colonel at his mercy, then generously inflicts only a scratch upon him to end the affair.

Gratified, Rodriguez invites Archer to his home, where he meets the lady for whose honor the Chileno had fought—his sister, YSABEL. Rodriguez is explaining his role in the revolution—rousing the Indians against the Spanish oppressors—when a message arrives, informing him of Archer's connection with Carrera, whom he despises as the man whose conduct caused the patriots' downfall at Rancagua. Rodriguez asks Archer to leave. Archer does so, believing that Danning sent the message.

Later Carrera orders the American to assemble his men at a nearby estancia. In company with Carrera's lieutenant, JUAN GARCIA, Archer sets out for the waterfront where he rounds up his mercenaries.

At the estancia he finds a large, well-equipped supply train with an escort of two hundred Chileno cavalry, and learns their destination: Mendoza, 1000 miles away, where Carrera will offer his army to General San Martin. Archer meets Miguel's squat, taciturn brother, HERNANDO CARRERA, and is astonished to note that he wears a jester's medal almost the twin of his own.

Next morning they set out across the vast expanse of the pampas—a sea of grass! As the journey continues Major Blackwell becomes surly with Archer,

harsh with his men. Archer soon learns why. One night Blackwell enters his tent and demands his share of the "loot" he believes Archer is receiving. Archer angrily rips off his aide's epaulets, demotes him to lieutenant and appoints CAPTAIN GREG KELLY, a Kentuckian, as his second-in-command. From Miguel Carrera, Archer learns that Colonel Danning is on San Martin's staff and, in the interests of strategy, he promises to postpone settling his score with Danning until after Carrera has talked with San Martin. Carrera sends Garcia ahead with a message for San Martin.

One night, in camp near the Mission of San Barromeo, Archer goes to General Carrera's tent and there finds Blackwell —murdered! Beside the body he picks up Hernando's medal. Though he feels scant loss at the death of the scheming Blackwell, Archer returns the medal to the general, to apprise him of his knowledge of the murderer's identity.

At last they approach Mendoza, to be met by a large escort of cavalry headed by Colonel Danning. When they enter the town they are astonished at the size of San Martin's forces, numbering at least 10,000 men under arms. Aware of Archer's hostility, Danning takes the American to his home and demands an explanation. When he convinces Archer of his innocence concerning the message to Rodriguez, the two men pledge friendship.

In the Administration Building, San Martin and O'Higgins receive Carrera and his staff. The chiefs of the Army of the Andes refuse the offer of Carrera's mercenaries. Carrera makes a counter-offer: He will free the mountain passes, through which San Martin's army must travel, of the hostile Araucanian Indians. San Martin accepts, but offers Carrera no more than the rank of colonel; Hernando Carrera is reduced to major; Archer to captain. O'Higgins offers Archer a commission in the Army of the Andes, but the American refuses to abandon his men.

While in Mendoza Archer encounters Garcia, who warns him of Carrera's treacherous nature. Having escaped Carrera's assassins on his "mission" to San Martin, Garcia has now enlisted as a private in the Army of the Andes.

At dawn Carrera's forces head for the Indians' stronghold, atop a huge rock in the Cordilleras. On the way Carrera reveals that this mission is exactly what he wanted, and forecasts his eventual return to power as commander-in-chief of the Army of Chile.

Soon after, they have their first clash with the Indians. An advance party attacks from ambush but is routed. They continue on to the base of the Rock. Here, on the plains below, they run into a large band of Indian gauchos who charge into their ranks swinging their deadly *boleadoras*. In the thick of the battle, Archer wields his saber viciously.

PART THREE

AT CLOSE quarters the long knife of the gaucho was the equal of a sword. One knife point ripped his jacket and a thrusting blade from behind severed his assailant's hand. He looked back briefly and saw the lean face of one of his men creased with grim satisfaction, then he was fighting again.

A new symphony of hooves thundered from the north and Kelly's men were coming, charging in line, two deep, and in loose order spread out across the plain.

Archer had just time to note their arrival when the Indian reinforcements started into action.

They were coming down from the rock and that was what he wanted, the thing for which he had scarcely dared to hope.

The gauchos had faded under the direct attack. They were individualists, untrained as cavalry, and they broke away from the solid fury of Archer's charge like leaves that were blown in the wind.

That same charge had carried Archer a hundred and fifty yards beyond Don Hernando's harassed and bitterly pressed troop, but Kelly was coming and Archer let them fend for themselves. He held his saber high and waved his troop on, tilting full stride for the rock.

The cavalry that poured down the winding trail from the inverted pyramid

was a different breed from the gaucho. These men were high-cheeked Indians, naked to the waist, their square cut hair tied around the forehead with colored ribbon.

They rode their tough little ponies with only the *recoas*, or sheepskin saddle, and they were armed with flint-and-bone-tipped lances from twelve to sixteen feet long.

Once clear of the narrow trail, they would have been all but invincible against men armed only with sabers, but Archer struck them when scarcely a score of them were loose on the broad floor of the valley. Some of the Americans toppled from the saddle in the first impact but sheer momentum overwhelmed the smaller force and Archer led the way into the main body of lancers, clattering in close order down the tortuous path.

In the first mad mêlée, Archer himself suffered two wounds but with the heat of the conflict on him, he scarcely noticed that he was touched. One lance laid his left arm open and he whipped his saber across the throat of the man who scored on him. In the tight press of men and horses the lance was a clumsy weapon and the sabers hacked their way with deadly efficiency up the slope.

Some of the Indians in the rear ranks, conceding the hopelessness of using their weapons effectively, hurled them like javelins over the heads of their comrades and then sought a rapid retreat to the summit.

Others behind them, not yet realizing how complete was the debacle, pressed forward.

Upon the rim above the trail, scores of Indians with bows and with poised rocks hesitated to let their missiles go, so hopelessly interlocked were friend and foe below.

Archer had been counting on this. In no other way could cavalry hope to storm those heights. It was a place to spend men and he was spending them. He knew that the Indians were taking their toll, but he was taking the position. A commander could think in no other terms.

It was hot heavy work and it told on the men who were in the middle of it. Even Archer faltered when he received his second wound and the battle might have turned there. The Americans in the rear ranks, however, unable to get into the fighting, dropped back and unslung their carbines. Firing into the packed mass high on the trail, they completed the confusion: then as the horsemen broke, more scattered reinforcements of Americans and Chilenos came up from the scattered commands of Kelly and Don Hernando. They opened fire upon the Indians gathered on the edge of the rock and now the arrows flew in answer.

Stones, too, dropped upon the trail in a veritable avalanche but Archer and at least twenty of his hard-bitten followers were clear of the vulnerable spots on the trail. Their enemies, most of them already having hurled their lances, faded before them and they pressed forward. Behind them other horsemen were daring to run the gauntlet of rocks and arrows while their comrades picked off the Indians who showed themselves at the rim.

"If only Miguel has made it!"

It was a desperate hope in Archer's heart now. The men under his command were too badly spent to fight their way from house to house in a defended city and even if the survivors from the plain won through to them, they would not be fresh enough nor sufficient in numbers, to take the rock against any worthy opposition. Miguel had to make it, that was all!

"Pistols!"

He uttered the command with stiff lips and it surprised him to hear his own voice ringing clear along the line of surging men behind him. Not one pistol in three would be any good. The priming mechanism jolted out of position easily, and sometimes the ball fell out of the barrel. Still it was the weapon of the next few minutes.

THEY had battled to the rim and a crouching band of Indians fired arrows at them as they swept onto the rock. Archer felt his horse miss stride and falter. He saw the Indians through a

haze and pressed the trigger of his pistol. The weapon misfired and he hurled it into the face of a stocky footman who was using a lance like a pike. Behind him there was a ragged volley and some of the Indians were hit.

His horse found stride once more and it was saber work again—back and thrust and slash through human barriers—butcher work that turned him sick despite the fever of excitement blazing in his veins.

Then suddenly flames were leaping to the sky from houses at the far end of the city on the rock. A heavy rattle of musketry echoed through the streets and the desperately battling Indians moaned aloud in dismay. They turned to the new menace, fresh troops in the town, troops that had felled trees across the gorge while the siege held the natives on the other side of the rock, troops who had left their horses behind them to come storming into the town with blazing musketry.

"Santiago!"

The battle cry of the conquistadores rang over the rock, the cry of victorious Spaniards, seldom uttered by rebels but called forth now by some racial memory that flared out of struggle against native odds.

"Santiago!"

Archer heard it, swaying in the saddle, and fought to hold himself erect. He rode at the head of his men in the direction of the sound and all native resistance broke as the Chilenos fired the buildings in their path and hopeless fighting men threw down their weapons to seek safety for their families. The cries of the women were a mournful hymn to the descending sun and the long lances of the sunset were less crimson than those wielded in the blood-red streets and the blazing buildings.

Don José Miguel Carrera won through to the center of the city and planted his straight sword in the soil of the central plaza. The hilt was like a black crucifix touched by the scarlet fingers of the sun. Don Miguel removed his tri-cornered hat and held it against his heart.

It was there that Archer found him.

He swung heavily down from the saddle and his horse, relieved suddenly of his weight, trembled violently and fell dead. Archer looked at him and his lips trembled with pain. He straightened and braced himself, his legs wide apart, and brought his hand up to salute before his commander. Don Miguel leaped forward and embraced him.

"My colonel! My colonel!" he said. "You are incredible!"

"Not a colonel now. You forget. Only a captain."

"No. No. A colonel in the Army of Carrera. Today is a great day. How great you will know. . . ."

Archer sagged but would not go down. Carrera snapped a command. "The American colonel is wounded. Summon Fray Ortega immediately."

Men hastened to obey the command and Archer was conscious only of waves of blackness that came and went across his brain. He knew that he entered a building under his own power and that he sat on a mat, refusing to lie down, but apart from that he had no very clear impression of anything even when the unfrocked Dominican, Fray Ortega, who was a lieutenant in Carrera's forces, worked on his wounds. He had a badly gashed left arm that had bled much, a skin-deep cut across his left breast, an arrow tear along his right jaw, a cut over his left eyebrow and various other marks that he was aware of only vaguely.

Ortega had a certain wizardry with wounds, a gift of staunching the flow of blood with poultices, of running swift stitches in deep gashes. He did his work on Archer deftly, conscious of the many others waiting, and when he was finished offered a flask of brandy. Archer gulped the fiery liquid and felt new life flow in his veins.

"Thanks!" he said.

"Put your thanks in a prayer for my soul."

Ortega slipped quietly away and Archer was content to sit there, letting the sound of voices come to him like sounds heard in a dream.

AN EXCITED voice was saying in Spanish: "Then the Black Hussars came, but they were not many. The Americanos took prisoners and would not re-

lease them to Don Hernando who demanded them."

Archer shook his head. He could remember much fighting but no prisoners. It was that blow over the heart that had done him in. It had not cut deep but there had been shock in it, that and the blood that ran out of him through his arm. After a while, he heard angry voices in argument and he could not understand what they were saying. His head dropped forward on his breast, then came up with a jerk when he heard a sharp voice utter his name.

"No, you cannot see Captain Archer. He is wounded. You must surrender your prisoners to me."

Archer blinked and struggled shakily to his feet. It was ridiculous that someone could not see him who wanted to see him. He was a soldier and what were wounds to a soldier. He stiffened the muscles in his legs, testing them, then walked stiff-legged to the door.

"I am Archer," he said thickly. "Craig Archer."

The room into which he stepped was lighted by candles and for a few seconds he could not distinguish anything in it. Then he was aware of someone saluting him and the grimy, anxious face of Greg Kelly, his second-in-command, floated whitely in the shadows. There was relief in Kelly's voice.

"Captain! God be praised, you're all right. I took some prisoners, sir, and I won't release them unless you give the order."

"Right! We'll hold a court. If we took prisoners, we'll try them. Bring them in. Bring candles with you!"

He turned back into the room he had left and something shocked and startled inside of him said: "Lord, I sound drunk, I'll have to watch it."

He sank down gratefully again on the mat and braced his shoulders against an adobe wall that felt cool. Kelly was standing before him and there were several men with him, but it was too much trouble to strain for a look at them or to attempt identification. Archer waved his hand.

"Sit down!"

Kelly sat on the floor. "These prisoners are—" he began.

"The prisoners can wait. How did we fare on casualties?"

Kelly hesitated, then plunged. "You left thirty men on the trail storming the rock, sir. I lost thirteen down below, including Lieutenant Dunne, sir. There are many wounds and I fear for some of them."

Archer's brain felt as though a cold sponge had passed over it. "Forty-three men!" He had lost forty-three men, perhaps more when the wounded who were grievously hurt joined their comrades. Forty-three men! Nearly a third of his force.

Miguel Carrera had reminded him several times that he was not Pizarro. Carrera was right. Pizarro had conquered a third of this continent, with fewer men at the start than Archer, fewer casualties at the end. He, Archer, had lost a third of his force in one battle.

"But we took the rock," he said aloud.

"Ay, sir. It was impossible but you did it."

"And the enemy's casualties?"

"Very heavy. Hundreds of them. They fought bravely but stupidly."

"And they had no firearms?"

"Most of them fell to steel. When the victory was all but sealed, the Black Hussars came upon us. They had firearms, but they were not many. We smashed them, but it cost us Lieutenant Dunne."

"Ah, yes." Archer shook his head. Dunne had been unfortunate. It was he who had drawn the first attack. "The Black Hussars!" That name rang a bell in Archer's consciousness. He had heard of them before. Where? The connection eluded him.

"The prisoners?" he said.

"Only two, sir. We'd not have taken them only I recognized one of them as a girl."

"A girl!" The bell was ringing loudly in Archer's brain now, but still he could not quite recall.

"Yes!" Kelly got to his feet. "Rise, prisoners!" he said. "Captain, I could not surrender them and one of them a woman."

Archer strained forward. His eyes focussed and he stared astonished at the man and the girl before him. He knew

now where he had seen that name, "The Black Hussars." On a card! A duel! Buenos Aires. He rose with an effort to his own feet.

The man was battle-stained, defiant, his dark eyes shooting hatred. He was dressed in a dark gray uniform with a black bandolier crossing his chest. His companion was dressed as he was, even to the tight breeches, but her hat had been lost and her dark hair floated free to her shoulders. She was staring at Archer with wide eyes. Ysabel Rodriguez and Colonel Don Manuel, her brother! Archer bowed.

"These are not prisoners, Lieutenant," he said. "They are my guests. Procure a bottle of wine."

CHAPTER X

THE TEARS OF THE SUN

THE city on the rock was conquered. The troops of Don Miguel, having done the least fighting, policed the streets and, having disarmed the natives, were commanding their labor in burial and mercy squads. The pack train which arrived after the fighting was over contained bandages and medicines besides food. The *arrieros* as non-fighting men worked at a multitude of tasks necessary to re-establishing order and their escort helped with the wounded. Only the Americans, who had borne the brunt of the fighting, were unassigned.

The fires set in the attack from the north had been extinguished, and the streets were lighted by torches which were stuck in niches beside the doorways of adobe houses. The conquerors had discovered a storehouse of native wine and many of them were drunk. The Carrera brothers were in the residence of the *Cacique*, the only stone house in the city: an ancient building that obviously antedated the adobes and which might have been, at one time, a temple. The distracted lieutenant whom they appointed in temporary command had not only failed to make his authority felt in the matter of Kelly's prisoners, but was having more problems in the city than his experience qualified him to solve.

In the house assigned to Archer, three American troopers sat in one room eating *chipa* and maize bread which they washed down with wine. Craig Archer, in the inner room, entertained his guests with a meal only slightly more elaborate. Rodriguez offered no argument about partaking of the food.

"A man eats because he must," he said, "even when he may not choose his host."

The faintness left Archer as he ate. "I have no quarrel with you," he said, "that would spoil good food for anyone."

He spoke to Don Manuel but looked at Ysabel. She was even more appealing here than she had been in Buenos Aires. Her tiny figure was emphasized by the uniform she wore, a boy's size and yet too large for her. Her face bore traces of fatigue and it was smudged with gunpowder but her hair flowed gloriously free and there were red copper glints in it where the candlelight found a reflection. She kept her eyes demurely downcast but her long lashes were as distracting as the eyes. Don Manuel's gaze was fixed on Archer's face with an almost hypnotic intensity. His pointed mustachios quivered as he spoke.

"The tool is as base as the man who uses it. A good tool can be used to shovel filth."

Archer's eyes hardened and he thrust his jaw forward. "You've got a clever tongue," he said. "Keep it clever. Understand, too, your own position and mine. I hold a commission from General San Martin. My men were attacked and one died before we ever fired on an Indian. You, señor, as the ally of lawless Indians, attacking my men, have much to explain. I expect that explanation and I, personally, apologize for nothing in my own conduct."

Don Manuel looked astonished, but only for a second. His eyes blazed, narrowed. One clenched fist rose and fell. "Assassin!" he said. "You are a hired assassin. Do you know what you have done?" He flung his arm wide. "You have destroyed one last lovely flower that was trying to grow back to the garden it had once been."

Señorita Ysabel looked toward him as he spoke and her eyes were suddenly

wet. Archer saw and was disturbed, but he held his face rigid. "Explain yourself!" he said.

Rodriguez drew his breath in sharply, tossed off a beaker of wine. "It is heartbreak," he said. "In this valley lived the last wise *Cacique*: once an exile from Peru, then exiled from Chile. His gods are not my gods and, if you have a god, they are not yours; but he loved his people. In this valley they came to him, the wise who wanted nothing but to live as their blood told them, to live as Indians because they were Indians—and the stupid, who could not learn the ways of white men because they were stupid; because often, too, the white man was more stupid than they."

"And they fought like guerrillas out of this valley. If you love Chile, the Army of the Andes was not safe from them in the passes."

The eyes of the two men held. Don Manuel's eyes still glittered with rage. "I love Chile and you are wrong," he said. "This valley was sanctuary, the Indian's last sanctuary if he was to be neither half white on the one hand nor barbarian on the other. I said that the *Cacique* was wise. On the rock he had his artisans, his intelligent Indians; on the plain below he had the stupid who herded cattle and grew grain. They were happy, the wise and the stupid, because they were free and undisturbed. There are barbarian Indians in the Sierras who may yet attack San Martin, but these made war on nobody."

"They attacked us."

"Why not? You came in force to their valley. It was theirs."

"Where were you? Why did you fight?"

"I was recruiting for Chile, for the Army of Liberation. This valley gave me twelve recruits. When a messenger overtook me, I turend back that my men might fight for their own." Rodriguez spread his hands. "Now they are dead."

IN SPITE of himself Archer was moved and a doubt stirred in his mind. From outside the sounds of the night came muffled: a half drunken song or two, the hoarse voices of conquerors commanding the conquered, the solitary drum of a burying party beaten in slow, solemn thumps. Glory had flared briefly like a blazing light, but the light was gone now and there was no glory: only drunkenness and pain and the drumbeats of a dirge. Archer passed his hand across his eyes, looked up suddenly at Señorita Ysabel.

"What is your version of all this?" he asked.

The quick voice of Don Manuel cut across his own. "I forbid you to speak to her. She does not know you. I have withdrawn my introduction."

Archer's jaw muscles tightened. "I speak to her as one soldier to another."

The girl's wide eyes were on his face. "To that I answer," she said. "You are a gallant soldier whatever your cause. My brother speaks truth. These Indians were betrayed. Were they warriors, they were too many for you to conquer."

Archer's shoulder twitched and the pain turned his face gray. He drank some of the wine. "Is that the whole truth?" he said.

"As men know it, yes," the girl said slowly. "Except for the recruiting we do. My brother tells the Indio in his village that he will fight to free Chile. The Indio says 'yes' and there are hot speeches at a big fire. But only the young Indio comes and he comes because he wants to fight and he cares nothing for Chile. It is thus that we recruit, but it is honest, señor, because truth is a great mystery to man and only God understands it."

She spoke simply, without emotion, but her words and the voice in which she uttered them caused Archer's throat to tighten. How very complicated was this business of fighting for a nation's freedom. She shook her head and his own triumph of the day seemed to fall like ashes at his feet.

"Thank you!" he said.

Don Manuel's expression softened. "I restore the introduction. I open to you again my home in Buenos Aires, if it pleases God that we meet there," he said. "But, señor, even if it opens a wound, thus I believe: someone told these Indians that you came as soldiers of Spain."

"What makes you think so?" Archer's voice was sharp.

"They knew of San Martin, they respected O'Higgins whose word in Chile was never broken. They would not fight the men of San Martin and O'Higgins. They were deceived into resistance."

"Why?"

The smile of Rodriguez was tight, grim. "You are a poor man, *amigo,* if you cannot find the motive."

Archer rose to his feet. Rodriguez rose with him. The Chileno extended his hand. "One favor, if you please, señor," he said.

"Name it!"

"The officer of Carrera demanded us as prisoners. Surrender us!"

"But why?"

"I ask only the favor, I do not explain the asking."

Archer looked into his eyes. "Granted!" he said.

He went to the door and dispatched one of his men for the Spanish lieutenant. The officer, whose name was Olmeda, presented himself promptly. His troubles had multiplied in the past hour and he had a desperate hope that responsibility was about to be lifted from his shoulders. Archer's first words disillusioned him.

"You demanded these prisoners?" he said.

"*Si,* señor. It was the command of His Excellency, Colonel Carrera, that I demand them."

"You are sure that it was his command?"

"Of a certainty, señor."

"All right. Sign for them and take them in custody."

The man wet his lips. It was still another complication in his unhappy life. "*Si,* señor."

"And see to it that they are kept in a decent house. No infested shacks."

"*Si,* señor."

Archer looked toward Rodriguez. There was laughter in the depths of his black eyes, but he did not speak. The eyes of Señorita Ysabel were eloquent and Archer bowed over her hand. His uniform reeked and was stiff with blood, his face swollen with wounds and partly hidden by dressings, but he was more of a cavalier to her then than he had been in Buenos Aires.

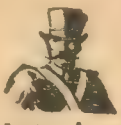
"Till again, señor," she said softly. "In a happier day."

"I count the hours," he said.

A guard of surly Chilenos came in and the prisoners were marched out. Archer drank deeply of the wine, then smashed the glass against the wall. He strode out alone into the smoky light of the street and at the first patrolling sentry he stopped.

"The house of the *Cacique?*" he said.

The man pointed and Archer walked stiffly in the direction indicated. His wounds ached and throbbed but his head was clear again and the nausea was gone from his stomach. A fighting man in condition can endure much and although he would feel worse tomorrow, for tonight he was still the commander of his own physical being.



TWO grim sentries with muskets in their hands barred the way to the stone house of the *Cacique.* They thrust the muskets in Archer's path when, ignoring them, he would have gone in.

"Nobody must enter, señor. Positively nobody. It is the order."

Archer straightened and looked at the man who spoke, his chin thrust forward. "Who am I?" he growled.

"You are Señor El Capitan Archer."

"That's right. Now get out of my way!"

He was Señor El Capitan and he was very dangerous-looking, and, *Santissima Virgen,* had he not ridden through blood to this rock? The two men exchanged glances. Whatever the penalty for letting this Americano pass, if they were wrong, it would be less, surely, than that of defying him. They lowered the muskets reluctantly.

"But, señor, it *is* forbidden," one of them said feebly.

"I'll take care of that."

Archer opened the big door. It was of dark wood, brass-bound, and all too obviously not Indian. It had come, perhaps, from some mission, but it fitted and a door need do no more. He closed it after him and stood in darkness so black that it vibrated. He listened and

from what seemed immeasurable distance he heard a low murmur of sound. He moved forward cautiously and the sound, so faint at times that it seemed to fade completely, still came from the profound darkness ahead of him.

The place was more like a monastery than a house. There was the chill of austerity in it and the rooms were huge with ceilings lost in height. Archer felt that, even in the darkness, since there are times when even shadows have dimensions. He advanced slowly and suddenly there was light, a thin glow that did not come from any ascertainable source, but seemed to rise—ghost-like—from the very floor.

He was very close to the diffused light before he saw the rolled-back stone and the steps that led downward. At the head of those steps two bodies lay, one across the other and face down. They were the bodies of medium-sized men who wore head-dresses of fur with feather trimming, and they had been run through the body. Their blood stained the first three steps.

Archer stood above them. This, then, was the *Cacique*, "the last of the wise Indians," and some other close to him; the *machi*, perhaps, wizard of his tribe. Archer stepped across the bodies and descended the steps.

In a huge, vault-like room sat the Brothers Carrera, facing each other across a stone table that was old when Pizarro came. They had golden goblets filled with wine on the table beside them, a smoky lantern from their own camp between them. Standing on the table, its back resting against the wall, was a heavy gold plate with the image of the Sun God emblazoned upon it. Over the table top, piles of coins and small gold images were scattered. Some of them had fallen to the floor unnoticed.

"You look at lizards and miss the stars. Señor, look! This is gold—pure gold."

The Brothers Carrera were very drunk—drunk with wine, with victory and with avarice. They laughed inanely, talked incessantly, neither of them listening to the other, laughing at they knew not what.

Archer, trail-dirty and with the blood of battle still on him, stood staring at them like some grim figure of retribution. Don Miguel looked up suddenly and saw him. His face turned white and the liquor drained out of his brain. His right hand dropped to the pistol at his belt.

Archer's hand lay lightly on his saber hilt. "Do not try it, Carrera!" he said.

Don Miguel's hand came back to the table-top. Hernando, slower to realize

what was happening, shook his head like a bull, then stared at Archer. His eyes widened, then narrowed. He made a brushing motion with his hand and his head dropped with a thud to the table-top. Archer's lip curled.

"I always thought that he was a good commander of mule packers," he said.

Don Miguel wet his lips. "And you are wrong!" he said. "Why are you here?"

"To catch two dirty murderers red-handed."

"You pain me. Roll my brother on the floor and take his place. We should talk, *amigo*."

"You roll him. My shoulder is stiff from conducting your dirty massacre."

Don Miguel rose. He staggered badly and had to clutch the table for support, but he twisted his brother with a grip upon his elbow and dumped him unceremoniously on the floor.

"He drinks badly," he said, "and you, my gallant butcher, talk like a priest while you clutch your saber. The world is full of madmen."

ARCHER sat down heavily upon the chair facing Carrera. "You had this in mind from the start," he said grimly. "I wondered how you knew your route so perfectly. You were after loot, you murdering scoundrel; nothing but loot."

Carrera picked up a handful of gold pieces from the table and let them fall slowly from his hand, clinking against their mates. "There is much more, *amigo*. In the room beyond there are ingots. These Indians have hoarded gold for centuries. The Spaniards demanded ingots. The Indio made ingots. Then other Indians killed his messengers and took the gold. Finally in such a cache as this, the gold is rediscovered. That, señor, is romance."

"There are two dead men at the head of the steps—and that is murder."

Carrera rolled his eyes. "*Malpaso del Infierno!* Again you look at lizards and miss the stars. Señor, look! This is gold, pure gold. It is money wherever men walk; where they trade and where they fight it is money. Money is more powerful than guns. With such an arsenal as this I can free Chile."

"You used to talk like a soldier. Now you are going to be a tradesman. Well, liberty is not bought and sold in the market place!"

"Think you not? With this money I can buy troops—the troops of anyone. I can buy Spaniards. Once you have bought your army, you can call tyranny freedom or call freedom tyranny and your men will believe you. They fight for pay, *amigo*, but the wise man offers them a compliment by covering the gold with the mantle of glorious words."

"And you, you cheap faker, talked to me of Chile while you schemed to murder Indians for gold."

"Murder!" Again Carrera rolled his eyes. "*Sacre!* You lose a third of your men and get yourself covered with wounds—and call it murder. What do you call war? For a soldier, Craig Archer, you have the mind of a child."

"I did not fight for gold."

"You joined my army on a contract that called for pay."

Archer flushed. "It was a good cause. I had no fortune. I could not even serve my own country without accepting payment."

Carrera's smile was mocking, a slow unveiling of white teeth. Archer thought of what the man had just said about the cause, the glorious words, being a mere compliment: the mantle thrown over the gold which hires fighting men. Carrera, however, was too wise to remind him.

"*Amigo*," he said softly, "you never understand me. I could have lived comfortably in Buenos Aires or under Spanish rule in Chile on the money that I have spent so far in fighting for my country's freedom."

"Gold from other murdered Indians in other mountain villages!"

Carrera shrugged. "Be that true or be it false, it is irrelevant. I had the money to purchase ease. I spent it to purchase what? Danger, discomfort, death, perhaps—scorn and insults from you, humiliation from O'Higgins. *Madre de Dios, amigo*, am I made of wood? I tell you that I look upward. Chile shall be free. I live for that and spend for it. I use the tools that come to my hand, from whatever hand they fall."

"And this gold is for the treasury of Chile, I suppose?" Archer's lip curled scornfully.

Carrera's eyebrows lifted. "A treasury? At the mercy of politicians, señor? Am I mad? No. This gold will be mine. I have seen the way of heroes for I have been a hero. Should I free Chile, a grateful people would fête me. They would kiss my hand and cheer my name." He snapped his fingers. "But if I, the heroic liberator, am poor, they will forsake me on the day after the feast to follow some fool whose wealth dazzles them."

"So you want to be a hero and wealthy, too."

"*Si*, señor. The two must go together. I will be the hero of Chile, and rich. Then the people will continue to honor me, and what I have personally won shall be secure. I will die respected because I did not let some stinking merchant, covered with jewels, patronize me in any public place."

"And the men who win all this for you? They will have to be heroes or you will not win."

Carrera shrugged. "You will share in the gold; not the men."

"Why not the men?"

"*Santissima!* I am patient. Look you! If I give the men a share now, they will be killing each other for double shares or building hatreds by gambling it away to one another. If I promise it to them at the end of the campaign, I make them cowards because they will no longer take risks."

"How about promising nothing, but dividing after the victory?"

"Ah, yes. So heroes may wallow in shame. A glorious army would then become the scandal of bordellos. No, señor. I pay according to the contract and the men will be frugal, thinking of their passage home. They will go home grumbling but they will be veteran soldiers with tales to tell: such to men of that breed is a form of riches."

"Yes, if they live through your march to glory."

Carrera spread his hands. "With that, señor, I have nothing to do. It is each man's dice with the angels."

ARCHER rose. On moral issues, Carrera was invincible because he recognized no such thing as morals. A policy served his ends or it did not—and there was no other test for it. The air in this vault was dead and Archer was feeling the effect of his wounds now. He knew what Carrera's game was and he could plan ahead. It was enough.

"There was a matter of prisoners," he said. "My lieutenant refused to surrender them to your officer."

"Ah, yes." Carrera tensed, his eyes wary.

"My lieutenant was correct. It was a matter to be discussed with me."

"And you discussed it?"

"Yes. I then interrogated your officer and found that you had ordered him to take the prisoners in custody."

Carrera was still tense. There was neither humor nor mockery in him now. He was not welcoming a showdown on the question of the prisoners, but the issue was obviously important to him.

"I issued such an order."

Archer nodded as though the matter held no importance for him. "Under those circumstances, I had your officer sign for the prisoners and surrendered them to him."

"Ah!" Relief shone like a light in the face of Carrera. "That is excellent. There should never be conflict between officers in the face of the men, *amigo*. When the officers are agreed and settle their differences among themselves, the men are well led. Soldiers must never get the idea they can prevail against officers."

"And the prisoners?"

"I will see to them personally."

Archer turned away. There was an evil gleam in Carrera's eyes and he knew that Carrera was aware of the prisoners' identity. It was not likely that he would release so dangerous a man as Rodriguez, particularly when there was past enmity between them. The expression on his face seemed to indicate that he had discovered two more lizards who were distracting him from his high vision of the stars.

Archer looked down upon the

sprawled, unlovely body of Don Hernando. The man was sleeping noisily, a drunken snore rasping through his nostrils, his lips drooling. His left arm was curled away from his body and Archer could see the little golden medal of the fool on his wrist.

There was an inscription on that medal which read: *Gold is never owned. It belongs only to its possessor.* He wondered if Hernando had remembered that inscription for even a minute while he was drinking himself stupid in triumph over his temporary possession of the gold in this vault, gold which other men had gloated over, owned for a time and died to defend.

Gold! It was the stuff that the Aztecs called "the tears of the sun." Well, the Indians of South America were far from stupid. There were tears in it for anyone who let it hypnotize him.

Don Miguel, too, was looking down at his brother. "I will spend the night here," he said. "Tell that fool, Olmeda, to double the guard. No one must enter here, or the men who permit an intruder will hang."

"Right!"

Archer went out and his wounds were blazing now. There was a moon high in a dark sky and the peaks of the Andes were touched lightly with silver. There was an awe-inspiring majesty about them. Cold and remote, towering to the stars, they did not invite passage. There was death up there, chill, impersonal death that did not recognize a man as a man, but rather as an intruder upon the rest of the gods.

"God! It would be easy to become an Indian down here and think like an Indian."

Archer did not know why he said it, the words were wrenched from him. He had been in the physical presence of gold that had served in pagan temples and some of its power had reached out to him. He shook his head and turned his back resolutely to the mountains.

The city on the rock was quiet now save in one corner where a man sang and a stringed instrument thrummed. Archer moved toward the voice and stood in the shadows.

There were a dozen Chileno soldiers sitting or lying on the ground before a low adobe house. The voice came from the darkened doorway—a deep, rich, haunting voice that sang of glory, of singing swords, of a wide plain and of the love of women.

These were guards, some of them, and soldiers who would rather hear brave singing than sleep. The voice, of course, was Señor Don Manuel Rodriguez Ardoiza, a prisoner of war.

Archer turned quietly away and he was pondering the folly of a man who would set Chileno soldiers over such a prisoner—a man who claimed himself that he could sell the coals of hell to a sacristan for the heating of holy water.

CHAPTER XI

COFFINS IN THE NIGHT

ARCHER slept heavily for six hours, then the pain of his wounds awakened him. Kelly was awake and changed the bandages for him.

"That damn Chileno, Olmeda, has been clamoring around," he said dryly. "Thought I should wake you up."

"Don't tell me. I'll guess. His prisoners escaped."

Greg Kelly winked. "You must have second sight, Captain."

"Tell me about it!"

"There's not much that I know, except that they cannot blame us for it. We had the prisoners and this Olmeda wasn't happy till he had them. This morning they were gone and four of the Chilenos were gone, too—horses, equipment, everything."

"Only four? I am surprised that Rodriguez did not talk the lot of them into following him."

"Maybe he didn't want them."

"You do not care for the Chilenos, do you?"

Kelly shrugged. "They are good soldiers, as brave as any. Good men, too. But they have too many leaders. It gets them in the habit of shopping around for a new general to follow. You never know where they stand."

Archer looked thoughtful. He had never considered the matter of these

several Chilean armies from that standpoint before. Some splendid manpower was being wasted through rivalry in leadership.

Kelly finished the re-bandaging. "I am glad that they got away," he said. "I never did like the idea of that girl being a prisoner here."

"Nor I." Archer walked around the room to loosen up his muscles. "But let us refrain from comment, Kelly. Tell the men to keep their mouths shut. It is a problem for our allies. None of our business."

"Right."

Archer got into a fresh uniform, had his breakfast and went on a tour of visits to his wounded. One man, Ames of Rhode Island, had died in the night, two more were in dangerous condition, and there were ten men with serious wounds that would take time in the healing. Most of the others had received wounds of one kind or another, but they were not complaining. It does something for a soldier's morale to serve under a leader who, himself, suffers wounds.

Out in the square again, Archer encountered Lieutenant Olmeda. The man had aged in a night. There were deep lines in his face and his eyes were red-rimmed. He managed a jerky salute.

"Captain," he said, "I am exhausted. No one has come to relieve me of command. Colonel Carrera is still in the house of the *Cacique* and no one, not even I, dares to enter. Major Carrera, too, is in the house of the *Cacique*. You will take command, Captain Archer?"

Archer stared at him without expression. "Who appointed you to command?"

"Colonel Carrera, señor."

Archer shrugged. "Then you must remain in command until he relieves you."

"But, señor—"

"I said that you must remain in command."

Olmeda's shoulders slumped. "*Si*, señor. But I have had no sleep. And my prisoners have escaped."

Archer discounted the Chilean lieutenant's claim that he had had no sleep. The man had probably settled down comfortably as soon as the camp grew quiet. Quite possibly, however, he had been without sleep since he received the news about the prisoners. It was a bad spot, but if Archer took responsibility upon his own shoulders now, it would confuse the issues and it would encourage the Carreras to stupidly delegate authority again at some future time. After all, they had kept the first two posts of command for themselves. He frowned at the hapless Olmeda.

"You permitted those prisoners to escape?"

"*Por el amor de Dios, señor!* Not permitted! I placed a double guard. I could not, myself, be everywhere. The rascally guard deserted and fled with the prisoners."

"They took horses and supplies, then?"

"*Si*, señor."

"How much headstart have they had on your pursuit?"

Olmeda was pale now. "Señor, there is no pursuit."

"No pursuit?"

"No, señor. The men do not recognize my authority to order troops to leave this rock. They say that it means a battle since not all of the Indios, nor all of the gauchos, were killed. Only Colonel Carrera, they say, can give the order for a battle."

Archer had difficulty in restraining a smile. He could well imagine the reluctance of these Chilenos to venture down onto the pampa in pursuit of their own countrymen when that pursuit would inevitably take them far into ideal ambush country where their defeated foes of yesterday could take revenge on them. If Carrera ordered it, of course, they would go; but men do not care to risk death for what might be, conceivably, the mistake of a subordinate.

Olmeda was watching Archer's face in desperate hope. "You, señor, can order them to go. You have horsemen of your own."

"My men and I are off duty. I am sorry, Lieutenant, but I am afraid it is your problem."

Archer turned away. He was not stirred to any deep compassion for Olmeda. The man was too weak to command troops. It was still a world where only the fit deserved to survive.

ARCHER spent an hour checking his horses and equipment and in assigning light duty to those men of his command who were fit. It started to rain then and he returned to his quarters through streets where a few dispirited Indians still worked under the direction of Carrera's soldiers. It was another hour before Carrera visited him, cursing fervently and shaking rain from his cape like a wet terrier.

"*Valgame de Dios!* That fool, Olmeda! He has let the prisoners escape. He—"

"Yes. He could not do the work of a colonel and a major, so you'll probably shoot him."

Carrera looked sharply at Archer. "Would not you shoot him?"

"No. Because if I were in command, I would accept my responsibilities or delegate them to my second."

"You have an evil tongue, Archer. I will not shoot him. I will demote him to sergeant."

"And prove to your men that they were right in not obeying his commands."

"*Sacre!* You are most unpleasant. You would have me hang medals on the fool?"

"I'd leave him alone. He did a rotten job as commander, but he did a thousand per cent better than his two superior officers did."

Carrera sat down heavily. "The situation is grave," he said. "We must not jest. That Rodriguez is a snake. He will go to O'Higgins. He will report this battle. We are discredited, *amigo*."

"How?" Archer's eyes were level. "We were commissioned to smash the Indians so that they would not harry San Martin's army. Rodriguez fought against us and *for* the Indians. How does he face O'Higgins and how are we discredited?"

He knew the answer to his question but he watched Carrera closely.

Carrera's eyes slid away from his. "We must be realists," he said. "San Martin will not approve that we have destroyed a village which contributed soldiers, and perhaps gold, to his army. O'Higgins and Rodriguez will put a bad face upon it. San Martin may send troops against us."

It was his indirect admission that he had ignored the hostile Indians against whom he had been sent in order to press this expedition of his own for loot. He rose to his feet as he spoke, pacing the floor with his hands behind his back.

Archer watched him indifferently. "My men captured those prisoners," he said. "You demanded them. I begin to understand how you lost Chile."

Carrera whirled and for a moment the savagery in his face was the savagery of a wounded leopard. He raised one clenched fist, then dropped it suddenly to his side.

"What do you want?" he said. "I cannot tolerate this bickering. How can I buy your loyalty?"

It was the opening that Archer wanted. "You cannot buy it," he said, "but I will trade you even. You get a good officer's best service and the disciplined service of his men." He paused and his jaw thrust forward. "For my part I demand frankness. I am tired of being told every time we make a move of what a difficult spot we are in—only to discover that you have been pulling some secret, shadowy piece of treachery that has gone wrong."

Carrera threw his hands in the air. "Insults. Insults. All that I ever receive from you is insults. Why do I abide it?"

"It is easy to stop it. Try being honest for a change. Call things by their right names. Let me know what I am fighting for."

Carrera stopped with his hands on his hips, then suddenly his eyes lighted up and his white smile flashed. "You are incomparable," he said. "And you, too, have endured much. I can give you no less than you ask."

Archer stood facing him. "I share the purpose of the mission as well as the risk? No more hidden purposes?"

Carrera took a step forward. "My hand on it, *amigo*. An exorbitant price would still be reasonable for such a comrade."

Their hands met and Archer made a conscious effort to sweep the doubt from his mind. He was a soldier and he measured a soldier's chances. His men and Carrera's were bound by more than chance alliance. They were in hostile

territory and they needed one another. The same was true no less of the officers—but he had to stand on his own rights. His named rank swung from captain to colonel and he cared little if it were one or another. On the basis of manpower commanded, Carrera could not deal with him as an inferior. The point had to be understood, now or later.

Carrera turned to the door. "You and your men must rest one more day," he said. "Mine have fewer wounds. I am having coffins made. Our honored dead will be buried at dawn with full honors."

"Why not at sunset today?"

Carrera's face expressed horror. "Never sunset, señor! You would consign them to the night."

Archer shrugged. It seemed a small matter. He had seen many soldiers buried, usually where they fell and at whatever time was convenient. The Latino, however, made a ceremony of everything and that was his privilege.

ARCHER went out later and the Indians were hard at work, cutting and planing logs into planks, building coffins without nails, the planks notched and cleverly joined into solid boxes. The Indian women were digging graves on the hill. Kelly joined him.

"It's a good thing to give them work to do," he said. "It takes their minds off the hell of being an Indian."

Archer grinned. It was a poor joke, but even a poor joke is better than none when there is little to laugh at. He shifted his men so that they formed a solid community north of the village square, and left the rest of the town to the Indians. He saw no point in posting sentries since the Chilenos would patrol the town anyway.

"Just tell the men to sleep with their weapons handy," he told Kelly. "They need all the rest they'll get."

He was thinking about Rodriguez riding across the pampa as he slipped off to sleep. Of Rodriguez and of Ysabel and of O'Higgins who might lead an expedition against them if they were branded as traitors.

Many hours later, and it seemed only minutes, he heard the hoarse whisper of Kelly. "Captain, wake up! Something funny is going on. Taylor is out here and wants to speak to you."

Archer blinked the sleep out of his eyes, suddenly alert. "Send him in!" he said.

Taylor entered, touched his forehead with two fingers in what passed for a salute.

"Captain, sir," he said, "there's something strange has happened. I didn't get the hang of it at first and I had to go easy. I wasn't sleeping well and—"

"Never mind about your insomnia. What happened?"

"I'm telling you, sir. I looked out for a breath of air and there's a burial party goin' on."

"A burial party? Indians?"

"Yes, sir—and not Indians. Chilenos they were. Haulin' coffins and cussing a bit. So I slipped out, curious like, and there's quite a bit of a moon so I have to be careful. They were hauling the coffins down the trail on mules and the wagons that brought our supplies are down below on the plain waiting for them. I'm a heathen Chinee, sir, if they don't put the coffins in the wagons and they've got a mounted escort all ready to start out."

Archer was sitting tense now. "And did they?"

"I did not wait to see. I came away to tell you, but it was slower getting back, what with soldiers sleeping in the houses and sentries patrolling and a bright moon. . . ."

"Where did they keep the bodies awaiting burial?" Archer asked abruptly.

"In the *Cacique's* house. The colonel, Carrera that is, said it was cool and dry in the cellars. We took our dead up there and—"

"Never mind!" Archer's jaw was hard. "Thanks for being alert, Taylor. You're a good man. I need a second lieutenant in Dunne's place. I'll post your name in the morning."

He waved away the man's thanks and reached for his clothes. It was only a few hours since he had taken the hand of Miguel Carrera on the pledge that there would be no more hidden purposes. He stamped his feet into his boots and turned to the door.

It was time for one last showdown with Don Miguel. He stopped to give one order to Greg Kelly.

"Turn out the men," he said. "I want them mounted and ready for action in twenty minutes. I want a dozen of them, with my horse, before the house of the *Cacique*."

CHAPTER XII

VIVA LA PATRIA!

THE dawn was still a half hour away. Black silence held the city on the rock save for the muffled sound of animals in motion near the top of the trail. Archer stalked swiftly across the central plaza, conscious that his wounds were paining him horribly; conscious of little else.

Before the house of the *Cacique*, two sentries paced and two stood quiet guard. There was a certain stiffening in the attitudes of the guards, a break in the rhythm of sentry-pacing when Archer was recognized. He was almost a legendary figure to these soldiers of Chile, an officer remote from themselves and consequently a bit terrifying as legendary figures are apt to be. They had their orders and they had been convinced that their lives hung upon their faithfulness to those orders, but this man was lightning that they did not care to call down upon themselves.

Archer ignored the sentries and stared with stormy eyes at the guards who blocked his passage to the door. "Is Colonel Carrera in there?" he said.

"No, señor!" The voice was shaky.

"Where is he?"

"I know not, señor. *No sta qui.*"

It was the voice of a man who dared not lie, who was not yet certain that he dared carry out the orders upon which his life depended. Archer did not crush lizards while he looked at stars. There was no point in going in if Carrera was not there, although he was prepared to go in through double this number of guards if his man was behind the door.

He stood there, staring at the two men, and the hooves of a horse crushed the gravel in the square. Carrera rode out of the shadows and swung gracefully down from the saddle. His eyebrows lifted in astonishment when he saw Archer.

"What, my captain! It is early."

"Let us go inside."

Carrera looked at him uneasily. "As you will," he said. He made a motion to the guards and one of them swung half of the massive door open. There was a lantern on a small table in the narrow room they entered. Carrera picked it up and carried it down a stone passageway to another room that was like the dining-hall of a monastery, except for the carvings of the sun god, the moon god and lesser luminaries. When he set the lantern down upon the floor, tremendous shadows danced upon the wall and lost themselves in denser shadow near the roof. Carrera wet his lips.

"If I tell you that I am sentimental, if not religious, and that I send the bodies of Catholics to rest in hallowed ground, you will not believe me," he said.

"You know damned well that I won't."

"But no. You are always difficult. My friend, I sent out in those coffins one half of the gold from this accursed village."

Archer's mouth was grim. "That was obvious."

"It was also sane. My brother takes it to his estancia near Buenos Aires. You and I, *amigo*, dice with destiny. If there should be disaster, an ally with gold upon whom we can call may well tip the game in our favor."

"That is as pretty as all your past explanations. We agreed that there was to be no more of that."

Carrera spread his hands helplessly. "My mind works too swiftly, señor. An idea comes. I act. I am unaccustomed to asking any man's approval."

"You had that idea when you ordered the coffins made. When you were pledging frankness and honesty to me."

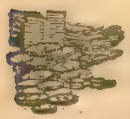
Carrera's eyes hardened. "It is done," he said. "It is wise. You need know nothing else. You are too brash. I, señor, am your commander."

Archer sat on his chair with his legs straight out, his stormy stare fixed on the face of Carrera.

"You are no longer," he said. "You

have been deposed. My men are in the saddle and at a word from me, they will annihilate your Chilenos. At this moment there are a dozen of them holding this house under guard. I told you that I would no longer put up with treachery."

Carrera's eyes were wide. He stared incredulously at Archer, then rose stiffly to his feet. Without a word, he walked back along the passage and threw open the door. Archer sat where he was, unmoving, confident of the discipline in his own force, certain that the men were there.



CARRERA came back and his face was wax-white. "You cannot do this," he said. "It is madness. I pay your men as I pay my own."

"You held me to you once with that card. The deck has been shuffled. There is gold a-plenty with which I can pay them. Gold that you took by force, that you can lose to force."

It was the motto on Hernando Carrera's medal, dramatized suddenly in grim, uncompromising action. *Gold is never owned. It belongs to its possessor.* Don Manuel may have been thinking of that as he stared at Archer.

"What do you want?" he said.

"You asked me that before, too. I told you. Now you will learn slowly what I want. You are removed from command. Please hold yourself under arrest, confined to these quarters. My own men will replace your guards."

"But, señor!"

"Your one chance is to obey orders gracefully. Remember that."

Archer rose and turned his back on the man who had been Chile's first president, the man who had fought for Spain against Napoleon, who had fought for Chile against Spain. Señor Don José Miguel de Carrera had climbed high and fallen far. Somewhere in the vaults beneath him was the gold for which he had fought a battle. Somewhere, too, in the vaults were the men who had died in that battle, dispossessed from their coffins in favor of the gold for which they died.

Outside the dawn was a thousand shades of color in the sky and a dozen Americans, bearded and hard from campaigning, sat their mounts and watched impersonally the four uneasy guards before the house of the *Cacique*.

Archer closed the big door behind him and his eyes swept the four Chilenos. "Guard relieved!" he said. He nodded to Taylor, who was wearing his promotion into action for the first time. "Detail four men to replace them, Lieutenant!"

"But, señor?" One of the guards ventured to protest, then quailed under Archer's hard stare.

"I said you are relieved. Return to your quarters."

"*Si*, señor."

The men were frightened, but force is force and must be respected. Four Americans took over the guarding of the big door.

"No one must enter—or leave!"

Archer swung into the saddle.

In the next hour, he replaced Chilean sentries at all key points with his own men. He had Olmeda and another officer turn out the Chilenos for review—and he counted heads. He returned then to his own quarters for breakfast and for deliberation.

He had eighty-nine men in his own command who were fit for service, fourteen with wounds which incapacitated them. That was all that remained of a hundred and fifty. There were ninety-two fit fighting men in the Chilean command plus twenty-two mule packers and laborers. Eleven Chilenos had serious wounds. The combined command, therefore, had a hundred and eighty-one fighting men. Carrera had detailed some of his best to the escort train of the coffins.

Somewhere on the plain was Rodriguez who would ride, probably, to San Martin and O'Higgins, branding this force on the rock as outlaws and closing the road to retreat. Somewhere in the mountains would be the Indians who had escaped from the battle, rallying their kind, probably, to return to the siege. The rock was poorly supplied to stand a siege. It lived normally on the meat and the grain of the pampa, brought by the gauchos who looked to the rock for support. That source was gone. The pampa was hostile.

The conquerors, then, were caught tightly in their own web.

He could, Archer knew, take his command back to Mendoza, surrender Carrera as a prisoner and throw himself upon the mercy of San Martin. Rodriguez, probably, would be there to vouch for him. Mendoza was a real military camp with disciplined soldiery. It represented soldiering as Archer liked it; planning, discipline, order. It represented, too, gentler things: the cool eyes of Helen Danning, for instance. Yes, and the slim, gallantly challenging Ysabel.

Only the terms upon which he must return were distasteful.

There remained Buenos Aires. He could seize the rest of the gold, strike out as Hernando Carrera had done and, paying his men off bounteously, take ship for the states. Perhaps!

It was easier to enter a foreign country than to leave it, particularly if one sought to leave with gold. Don Hernando would be before him and there was evidence that the man had political influence in Buenos Aires. The mercenary troops of a Carrera would hardly be permitted to leave against the wishes of a Carrera. Buenos Aires was too big for force or daring to prevail against authority.

What then? He had the command of this force. He could do with it as he wished. He need only make a decision.

ARCHER paced the square and looked up on the Andes, their white crowned majesty mocking the puny attempts of man to play the role of destiny. He reached in his pocket and shook the little gold medal in his hand. It came to rest in his palm with the face of the fool downward.

The fool calls upon the tiger to defend him from a dog, the inscription read.

That was it. That was wisdom and the answer to everything. He was in a trap, a terrifying trap, but it could easily be worse. He might well make it worse by turning for help to any quarter, by placing his reliance upon anything beyond himself. It is so easy to exchange the dog of one dilemma for the tiger of a greater one. If the medal had fallen the other way, it would still have been a sage adviser. He knew well what was on that other side; the face of a grinning fool and an inscription.

I have two sides. Power has only one.

That, too, was something to remember. The way of power was not the way of hesitation and doubt, the path of indecision. Power struck cleanly, hard. Power mounted to the saddle and rode to an objective, let die who would beneath the hooves. Power was the glorious, horrible, stimulating, savage storming of this rock. He, Archer, could have died on that mad, hacking charge and he would not have cared.

That was the important thing. He would not have cared. Probably none of those who did die cared one bit. Heat and passion and conflict wipe out fear and even the love of life. A man sitting on this rock and wrestling with a decision might cower in the shadow of death, afraid for himself and shuddering away from the necessity of taking life. A man with a swinging saber in his hand and the path of power beneath the hooves of his horse feared nothing. Death was the sardonically chuckling companion of the man who rode hard, not a foe to be feared. When steel sang and blood flowed, one could hear the whisper of death undaunted. It seemed to say: "What fear you, comrade? Are we not together?"

Archer's shoulders straightened. It was good to be a soldier and to possess a soldier's mind. What hells of doubt and craven fear, a scheming politician lived on! The man who tried to scheme his way to power died a thousand deaths while death itself sneered at him, despising him. Cleave straight, exchange no dogs for tigers and read only one side of the shield. That was power. That was the way to go.

He felt the iron of decision in his veins and it was a good thing. He would go to the house of the *Cacique,* but first he must see his second-in-command. Kelly saluted him gravely, but with the light of excitement in his eyes.

Greg Kelly had read the signs aright. There had been a *coup d'état* and an American was taking this expedition on

to wherever it might go. Archer told him no more than he had to tell him.

"General assembly in the square at sundown," he said. "I want every fighting man, American and Chilean, present. See to the proper assignment of forces."

"Right, sir."

Kelly understood that, too. He would distribute the strength of the American forces so that the Chilenos would be flanked. He was a good man, the sort that one wanted for a second. Archer rode to the house of the *Cacique*, swung down stiffly from the saddle and returned the salutes of his guard.

INSIDE Archer found Carrera sitting at the table where he had left him, cold sober, his arms folded on his chest. Don Manuel stared at him but did not speak. Archer seated himself, legs straight out.

"We have a hundred and eighty-one fighting men," he said. "We are going across the Andes to Chile."

Carrera, startled, unfolded his arms. "When?"

"Two days or three. We have no longer than that and we must prepare as best we can."

Carrera drew a deep breath. "Such was my own plan," he said, "but it still frightens me."

"It is my plan now. If it frightens you, you may stay."

"Bah! Again I say that you do not understand me. You never did."

"Or perhaps I understand you too well."

"You deceive yourself. Look! You consider me selfish, greedy for gold. You doubt my patriotism, my love for Chile. Am I not right?"

"Correct!"

Carrera rested his elbows on the table, his chin upon the flat of his fists. "Why then did I not go with my brother and the gold to Buenos Aires?"

"There was still gold remaining."

"No. And you do not believe that. I could have taken more gold than I sent. I could forget Chile and be rich and powerful in Buenos Aires. Rich and powerful men can control nations. A scoundrel would say: 'What matters it if I live on one side of the mountains or the other, so long as I live comfortably?' "

"Keep talking. I am interested."

"I did not say that. I have been in Spain with army rank and money. I still loved Chile. I have been in your United States which is still young and welcomes men with money. I loved Chile. I have been in Buenos Aires. *Amigo*, gold runs through my fingers and changes into men and weapons that will fight for Chile. Where then am I selfish or greedy, a schemer for self?"

"You're mad for power."

"It is easier to obtain in places where it is not necessary to seize it with a sword from men who use swords well."

"All right. Suppose that I admit that you are a fine, upstanding patriot. I still cannot trust you. I do not intend to trust you."

"Because you set your will and your judgment forever above mine. You have won. I split my force to protect our possible retreat and you are stronger. I accept your orders."

Archer stared at him grimly. This man could talk. Plausibility flowed from him in ripples of soft speech. To listen to his voice was to be convinced but when one left his presence, doubt returned. His mind was elusive, not to be pinned down by blunt minds that were driven by facts.

"You told me once, Carrera, that once in Chile, with a force however small, your former followers would rally to you."

"With armed men—and with gold—yes."

"With gold? Then, you cannot count on any support that you cannot buy?"

"We discussed all of that before, *amigo*. All support is bought—in one way or another. Even the stupid peon does not accept a beggar as his leader. He reasons that a leader who can improve his lot will not be, himself, in need. Who can deny such reasoning?"

Archer pondered, looking stormily at Carrera, the instrument to which he was bound, coup or no coup. "I am going to leave you in command, as far as the men are concerned," he said, "because I do not want you plotting under me nor do

I want Chileans and Americans divided. But I will give you your orders. You will consult me before attempting the use of any authority."

"You drive hard bargains."

"I have to. Now let us draw up a map of what is before us."

"First, señor, the gold. We must be discreet about it."

"More coffins? No. And no discretion. If I accepted your invitation of 'Let us be scoundrels together,' I would be your man again. We will deal honestly with the men and tell them of the gold."

"You are mad!"

"No. It is to be used in the service of Chile even as they are. They will understand that. Each man is to be paid according to your contract with my men in advance. He receives a bonus of a like amount if our campaign is successful."

"They will gamble and cut one another's throats."

"No. Because no man will receive as a bonus any greater amount than he himself has saved. Any man having more than he receives here will have the excess subtracted from his bonus. The share of any man lost goes into a pool for all unless he has willed it to relatives."

"And us?"

"We share as the rest. You on the same basis as myself. The amount is written in the contract. Unfortunately I cannot control what went to Buenos Aires. You got away with that. But half of whatever gold is here remains for the Indians."

"Insane!" Carrera was suddenly angry. "What conqueror leaves wealth to the conquered?"

"We do. We set an example for the ages." Archer's lips curled with irony. "Now let us discuss the campaign."

At sundown he sat on his horse beside Carrera, facing the assembled troops. Carrera announced solemnly that the dead, with the exception of pious Catholics sent to Buenos Aires for burial in hallowed ground, had been interred in the vaults beneath the stone house. It was a lie that Archer permitted him for the sake of morale. There was a solemn moment of respect for the dead and a lonely drum rolled out a sad salute.

Archer then announced the plan for payment and the dead were forgotten. He waited until everyone understood, then turning slowly in the saddle, he gestured to the red gold sky beyond the Andes.

"There," he said, "lies Chile."

Carrera broke the solemn hush that followed his words. "*Viva la patria!*" he said.

The Chilenos echoed his words in a long cheer and American voices swelled the chorus. The Andes were high and cold, the trail was long, and at the end the Spaniards waited; but here were gallant and generous leaders, gold to be divided, brave men to share in both wealth and danger.

Viva la patria!

CHAPTER XIII

PASO DEL DIABLO

THERE were only a hundred and fifty fighting men in the party which headed into the Andes from the city on the rock. Archer had called for volunteers who would stay, build wagons and escort the wounded to Buenos Aires. Eleven Americans and twenty Chilenos had responded, sacrificing their chance at a bonus for the more welcome chance of spending a share of what they had at an early date. Most of them had minor wounds or were otherwise weakened for mountain campaigning and the role they chose was hazardous enough. They had a fifty-fifty chance of getting away from the rock and across the plains alive. They knew it and they accepted that chance.

The men who turned their faces toward Chile were hardened, confident, singing and jesting as they rode. Donkeys taken from the Indians and surviving mules of their own pack train trudged along at a steady pace of between five and six miles an hour. They had *aparejos* on their backs beneath their loads—rawhide sacks filled with grass that saved them from chafing under the weight they carried. There were gold ingots in those packs, meager medical supplies, blankets and all too little food:

carne seco (dried beef), flat, hard bread, cheese, a small quantity of dried vegetables for soup. There was ammunition, too, and spare rifles.

If the party was better equipped to combat Spaniards than it was to face the fury of the guarding Andes, no one spoke of that.

Viva la patria!

"History would be dull without madmen, *amigo*. We ride with the ghosts of the great." Carrera's words were mocking, but his smile flashed. He was himself again; seeming to be the commander, although not actually in command.

Archer, beside him, was grimmer, but his eyes were bright. "Nothing is mad unless it fails," he said. "We shall not fail!"

He had forced his mind away from that disciplined camp at Mendoza where patient men prepared for more than a year to conquer the Andes—men who invented and built devices for slinging loads over crevasses; men who experimented constantly with packloads and beast capacities; men who built artillery and worked out methods for transporting it. Mendoza and the Army of the Andes were something apart. Here were one hundred and fifty men and the spur of necessity. San Martin might *plan* to cross the Andes. Archer *had* to cross them.

The devils who dwell in all mountains were as tricky as members of the tribe Carrera. On that first day they made things just difficult enough to try men's mettle; not to discourage them. The road skirted the edge of the mountains and the morning was hot. The sun reflected back from fine white sand and there were no trees. The trail itself was cluttered with boulders and large stones which had to be removed by hand. Twice Indians perched on distant rocks and watched them.

In the afternoon they entered the sierras and started the slow trek up a winding road between high, wooded ridges. Darkness found them camped along a brook, weary but goodhumored. The soldiers sprawled on grass while the mule packers removed the pack animals' loads, their voices ringing out cheerfully.

"Que hay, Mulero?"

Other men sang and a few musical instruments appeared while food was distributed. *Santissima!* This was the way to go to Chile.

They were cheerful still in the dawn and the steepening climb did not daunt them. Up! Up! They rode single file and they passed orders up the line in echoing shouts. Ride on, *vaquerista!*

Down into a wide, fertile valley, then off to the right with an incredibly steep trail that climbed up the face of the range. The shouts became less cheerful, then ceased altogether. Men and beasts crawled along the steep wall of the mountain and the trail zigzagged so sharply that Archer, looking ahead from his position in the middle of the line, could see the heads of the animals for a half mile ahead—half of them pointing north, half south.

Suddenly there was a shrill shriek of terror as a horse lost its footing; a man's husky, frightened cry; then man and animal were spinning down a sheer declivity like a pinwheel. Above them on the trail other animals snorted and pranced and fought their riders. Confusion swept along the line and then, as swiftly, order was restored. One American, John Boyce of Rhode Island, would never see Chile.

The mountain devils drew back into the deepening shadows, satisfied for the moment. The rocky sides of the trail threw back echoes of a full day's heat and the caravan crawled on.

There was singing again that night in the camp, but not so much of it. In the morning two sentries were missing and on the ground were two broken arrows, the signature of the enemies who took them.

"We cannot find Indians in these mountains, *amigo*. As well chase goats," Carrera said. "We can but double the guard next time."

Archer nodded grimly. "One enemy at a time is enough."

He was beginning to understand why the Indian legends populated the mountains with devils who, invisible themselves, fought savagely against men who dared the passes. "Something" in these mountains was hostile to man. The feel-

ing of danger mounted with each foot of the trail that was conquered.

THE mountains were all around them now, hemming them in. For hours they followed the dry bed of an ancient river and the heat stifled them: then the trail wound upward again and men were silent. The mountainside overhung the trail on the right; to the left dizzy precipices dropped sheer for hundreds of feet.

Animals squealed with fright and a dislodged stone or a dropped piece of equipment clattered and echoed weirdly for minutes.

The trail narrowed to fifteen inches and men, dismounting to lead their animals, were white with fear of it. Loose rocks slid from under their feet and the mules stopped every few minutes to test the way ahead gingerly with their forefeet.

Three horses and two men dropped off into space and only those closest to them knew that they were gone.

Black peaks surrounded them that night and the *arrieros* built fires of dung collected through the day. There was the chill of nearby snow masses in the wind of evening and no one sang.

The fourth day was like the third save that the trail was steeper still, the footing more broken. Two more men died but no one spoke about them. No one spoke longer about the danger from Indians either. The Indians, obviously, having exacted a symbolic revenge, had left them to the demons of the high sierras.

One Chileno sobbed through the night and that was a portent of things to come.

They arrived at the second of the three great passes on the fifth day and men sang again, sang drunkenly and loudly. Other men shouted and made wild gestures, their eyes wide. It was as though some great demon of the pass had bewitched them suddenly. They scarcely saw one another. Each man was concerned only with himself. Archer found it horrifying. He shouted commands and no one paid any attention to him. One voice, louder and hoarser than the rest, particularly infuriated him. He looked up for its author vainly, then pulled up, shaken.

It was his own voice. Between commands to the others, he had been shouting even as they.

Carrera, wax-white, joined him at the noon stop. They were pulled into a wide plain just below the glaciers, with the wind beginning to sing to them. Men rolled on the ground and neglected the animals. Incoherent laughter sounded from all sides. Some men, bent double, were vomiting.

"It is the *soroche!*" Carrera said hoarsely. "The mountain sickness. Some of these men will go mad; some will die."

Archer breathed deeply, took a grip upon himself. "We must reach those least affected and help the others," he said.

Carrera nodded. "Soup!" he said. "There is a soup of herbs."

They moved together among the men, and with the aid of those who were touched least by the *soroche* they removed packs and prepared a pungent, savory soup. It was no time for prerogatives of rank. Archer, his head tight to the point of bursting, worked as hard as any man. Kelly, his second-in-command, was rolling on the ground and laughing hysterically. The Americans, generally, were harder hit. Some of the Chilenos seemed scarcely to feel it.

"It is because the air is thin. One cannot breathe properly," Carrera said. "This is the route of high passes. The highest lies ahead of us."

They ladled out the soup and the men quieted. In an hour the laughter and the singing had stopped, but the men were dull, heavy-eyed. Archer stood beside Greg Kelly and looked down at him, unbelieving.

Kelly, the gay and gallant, who had stepped into the rank of second with determination and skill, was dead. He lay doubled over on the hard ground, his eyes glassy and his mouth drawn agonizingly wide. Kelly, who had ridden to the wars, had died alone without a parting word and without one gleam of glory to light his passing.

Two of his comrades had gone with him to provide an escort and that was all.

ARCHER rode on, sobered. Ahead of him the Andes towered even higher. The line filed on and now the winds of the world rushed to meet them. Swift flurries of snow blew into their faces blinding them and water froze in the canteens. The trail narrowed again and they spaced the animals so that the less hardy horses might, each of them, follow a mule—surest-footed of the beasts.

It snowed harder and two days blurred into an ordeal of sheer endurance. Archer did not know what was happening along the line. There was no longer a command. It was each man for himself against the elements—riding, dismounting, unloading frightened pack animals, reloading, pushing on. Men fell down the faces of frightening cliffs and were as forgotten as the animals who fell with them.

Such was the passage of Paso del Diablo—a thing felt rather than seen or experienced.

Ice formed on trails that were only a foot and a half wide. Men had to string guide rails of rope across these dizzy ledges and other men, gripping the rope, had to bully and tug to force the animals through. A fortune in gold tumbled into black abysses and no one cared!

Then suddenly they were over the top of the world and sliding straight down the terrifying trails into a shadow-filled pit. Black mountains thrust barren fangs of rock upward toward the snow and far below giddy precipices the tops of tall trees were like blades of grass.

Taylor, his lath-like figure leaner than ever, the hollows in his cheeks more pronounced, clawed his way back along a dizzy chute to Archer.

"Indians!" he said huskily. "They're making friendly signs. What will we do?"

Hope stirred in Archer. He roused himself from a dull torpor that had been settling upon him.

"Signal that we are friends!" he said. "This must be Chile!"

"Ay, sir. Chile!" Taylor seemed to take on new life, too. He turned swiftly to the trail—and stepped suddenly off into space.

So suddenly did he go that Archer could not believe it. He swung from his horse and threw himself face downward on the edge of the narrow trail, his eyes straining downward at a miniature world of trees and rocks a thousand feet below.

"Taylor!" he called. "Taylor!"

The echoes threw back his voice and two birds rose, wheeling from a ledge, but there was nothing else. A man who had fought Indians along the Missouri and who had earned the rank of lieutenant in this wild country was down there somewhere, what was left of him. He had made only one misstep and he no longer mattered. Archer rose stiffly. Blindly he struggled down the trail on the mission that Taylor had left unfulfilled.

The caravan had halted and three solemn-looking, squat-faced Indians sat their ponies bare-back, blocking the way. They wore *ponchos*, breeches of leather and sandals of woven straw. There was no apparent force at their backs and they had no weapons showing but they sat there proudly, unafraid. Archer raised his hand, palm out.

"*Amigos!*" he said.

The Indian who was obviously the leader pointed at Archer's chest, then waved backward along the length of the caravan.

"*El Jefe?*" he said.

Archer nodded yes. He was the chief. The Indian seemed satisfied, but he repeated "*Amigos?*" again with the rising inflection of a question.

"*Si. Amigos.*"

It was enough. The Indians turned. Slowly the caravan proceeded, Archer at their head. In a broad valley, hours later, they halted the entire party on the banks of a stream. Indians seemed to rise from the ground around them, horsemen clothed in leather.

Carrera joined Archer and faced the leaders. "We have come, *amigos*, to free Chile," he said. "I am General José Miguel de Carrera."

The Indians looked at him, then looked at the tired, ragged, dispirited "army" which he had brought across the Andes to free a nation. Something very much like humor lighted in their eyes.

The leader bowed. "Chile will like

very much to be free," he said. "You eat now?"

Indian women appeared from the forests as magically as had the men. Stew pots were hung over fires and the air became fragrant.

Archer sat facing Carrera at the edge of the clearing. "My own guess is that we are prisoners," he said grimly.

Carrera was thinner than ever. Caked with dirt, he lacked the sinister splendor of other days, but his eyes still glittered with plans that were unfulfilled.

"With the soil of Chile under his feet, *amigo*," he said, "no Carrera is ever the prisoner of an Indio. Let me eat and rest, then watch."

Archer shrugged. "I am still in command," he said. "Do not forget that. I, too, will eat and rest."

Carrera laughed, a strained laugh but still a laugh. "You move in straight lines, my gallant bull," he said. "It has never pleased me yet to turn your charge."

"Do not try it."

Carrera's eyes softened. "Because, though you will not believe, I like you."

Archer shrugged again and looked away. Strangely, illogically, something deep inside of him had always insisted upon liking Carrera, too. That feeling had come uppermost many times and had softened his attitude toward the man. He fought it down now. Carrera was a snake, a treacherous snake—dangerous every hour of the twenty-four.

He raised his eyes and Carrera was watching him. He looked as though he knew precisely what Archer was thinking and as though the knowledge amused him.

Carrera gestured idly with one hand. "Man takes what is set before him," he said. "Destiny this moment provides food."

IN THE space of one short night in the valley, life flowed back into the veins of men who had been little better than walking dead. Indians, silent and unobtrusive, cared for horses and pack animals, food was plentiful, the night was cool for sleep. In the morning men bathed in the stream and they were soldiers again.

One hundred and fifty of them had ridden into the Andes; one hundred and four of them rode out. Archer's Americans were now fifty-five; the gold that was to have bought support in Chile was scattered over the sierras; but there were still weapons, still men to wield them.

They rode down to broad plains, studded with low hills and the Indians, never obtrusive, rode behind them and on their flanks. Some of the Indians were lancers, others carried bows slung across their shoulders, a few carried ancient Spanish muskets.

"*Soldado de cuero*," Carrera called them because of the leather breeches and the leather vests under the *ponchos*. "A good armor against arrows," he said, "but who, save other Indians, shoots arrows?"

He seemed to be measuring the chances of a hundred and four revived veterans, Chileno and American, against the slightly smaller force of Araucanos. Archer's jaw was grim. These Indians had provided hospitality; he would not be a party to treachery.

They topped a rolling crease in the plain suddenly and there was a village before them; a flat, yellow-and-brown adobe village that sprawled over the flat.

Carrera stood in his stirrups, his forehead wrinkling with an effort of memory. "San Vicente!" he said. "We hanged a Spanish captain there in 1813."

The Indians seemed to be drawing in on the flanks and suddenly a company of horsemen rode from the village and came across the plain at a canter, the sun reflected from their lances. There were at least fifty of them and they rode in the loose fashion of irregulars, but they wore helmets of black and each man wore a broad black band across his chest.

Carrera swore hoarsely. "*Madre de Dios*, we are betrayed! The Black Hussars! Always where *he* is, any Indio on a horse is a Black Hussar." He half turned in the saddle, his lips already forming an order.

Archer rode close to him and gripped his wrist. "No!" he said. "They are prepared for that. If that is Rodriguez, we will treat with him."

"Treat with the Devil. You will fare better. Let us charge, *amigo*."

"No!"

Carrera looked behind him. There were more Americans than Chilenos and the Indians pressed from the flanks and from the rear. His face set woodenly and he sat his saddle, resigned.

Rodriguez rode up at the head of his horsemen and his white teeth flashed. He swept his black, tri-cornered hat from his head in a mocking salute.

"This pleasure is not unexpected," he said. "I have waited for you patiently." His eyes swept from Archer to Carrera. "It was in this ugly village, when we were comrades," he said, "that once we hanged a Spaniard."

CHAPTER XIV

THE WAY OF PATRIOTS

ON January 17, 1817, when Archer staged his *coup d'état* in the city on the rock, General San Martin started across the Andes. His force consisted of 3000 infantry, 960 cavalry, 1200 muleteer militia men, 120 laborers and 70 staff officers. He took with him provisions for 5200 men for 15 days, 9000 mules carrying ammunition, spare arms and a train of field artillery.

There was no gold in saddle bags or in the packs, but there were nearly two years of planning and preparation behind every move of officers and men. They marched in three commands over 15,000 foot passes and they knew in advance how far they would progress each day and exactly where they would spend each night.

The field kitchens moved with them and when the dangerous altitudes were reached, men were watched for the first symptoms of *soroche*. They were given onions to eat and if they developed alarming symptoms, they were fed a soup made of onions and cheese which long testing had proven to be the best thing for mountain sickness.

With this army, too, went the pomp and majesty of Holy Church: the monks of Saint Francis and Saint Dominic, the daily masses, the fierce ardor of troops that feel God with them, a mighty Force above their very banners.

This was the Army of the Andes, the dream of José Francisco de San Martin who considered a nation's freedom so precious a thing that nothing must be left to chance in the fight to win it. At the head of the largest army rode the gallant O'Higgins, destined to strike the first blow for his native Chile, riding the route of the Garganta de los Patos.

Already in Chile and recruiting irregulars as he swept up from the south was Manuel Rodriguez Ardoiza.

In the town of San Vicente he sat in an adobe house behind a heavy table with his sister at his right hand. Facing him across the table were Craig Archer and José Miguel Carrera.

"We thought that you had gone to Mendoza," Archer said.

Rodriguez smiled whitely. "And you feared that I would call the lightning of San Martin down upon you! That was but one of your mistakes. I had my work to do. Because two who know the mountains well can travel light and cross them swiftly, we were well ahead of you. Because I, *Gracias a Dios*, have the tongue of angels, an army came to me from the plain and the mountain, perhaps out of the very trees."

He was patently pleased with himself.

Carrera glared at him with undisguised dislike. "That army can scatter as swiftly," he said.

"Why, then, did you not scatter it—you and your mercenaries?"

Archer hit the table-top. "Because I forbade it. If you Chilenos had your way, you would exterminate one another. My men are already veterans and they have not yet seen a Spaniard."

Ysabel Rodriguez was looking at him with something warm and glowing deep in her eyes. "That is true, Colonel Archer," she said. "One leader loves gold, another loves fighting; both claim that they love Chile. Chile is like a proud woman. She will not yield to a man who follows other mistresses."

Archer nodded gravely. "I could not have said that as beautifully," he said, "but it is truth."

Rodriguez laughed. "Chile will yield

to O'Higgins," he said, "but we who quarrel must provide the wedding."

"And O'Higgins cannot hold the love of Chile. He is not firm enough." Carrera's lips were thin, hard.

Rodriguez lifted his eyebrows. "He is not a tyrant, you mean. You would give Chile a tyrant to follow—yourself!"

"Chile has a tyrant, Field Marshal Marco del Pont—*el diablo le espera!* Who follows him must be a little less a tyrant, and the next leader still less until, some day Chile is ready for a man who is no tyrant at all. The time is not yet."

Carrera was very eloquent, leaning forward and gesturing as he spoke.

Rodriguez looked at him with dislike, then ignored him and turned to Archer. "Colonel Archer," he said, "I offer you your rank in my army which I take to join O'Higgins on this side of the Andes."

"Thank you. And my associate, General Carrera?"

It was the first time that Archer had accorded the "General" to Carrera since the night in Mendoza when both had been re-commissioned. Carrera's eyes widened slightly, the eyes of Rodriguez narrowed.

"It is not pleasant," he said, "that one should hang a man with whom he has drunk wine. There is a wall behind this house against which better men have died. My firing squad rests in the yard. When the general has finished his wine, they will shoot him."

THERE was a sudden hush in the room. Ysabel Rodriguez turned pale and her eyes lowered discreetly. Carrera stiffened. Like Archer he had laid his arms upon a table in the hall when he entered this house for a parley. His eyes glittered. Before he could speak, however, Archer rose to his feet.

"My men rest on their arms," he said, "and at a whistle from me, those arms will be in their hands. I do not consent to the execution of General Carrera."

Rodriguez looked up at him. "Your men would be overwhelmed as by an avalanche," he said.

"Not before they had completely ruined your gift to O'Higgins. Cause me to whistle and I'll promise you more Indian corpses than soldiers before my men go down!"

He was standing straight, his legs spread slightly and braced, his chin out-thrust. Rodriguez looked at him, then laughed suddenly and reached for his flagon of wine.

"I but test you, *amigo*," he said. "I give you Carrera if you want him."

"No man gives or takes me, no man fights my personal fights." Carrera was white to the lips. "Give me a sword and take one. I will meet you in the yard and nail your bragging body to that wall you mentioned."

"Agreed!" Rodriguez rose in his place.

Archer swore softly. "You damned fools?" he said. "When do we start thinking of Chile?"

The two men stood glaring at each other. Rodriguez spoke without taking his eyes off Carrera. "You have no Latin blood, señor. You do not know the depths of hate between two men who once were comrades. There is no stronger hate."

"Then fight your duel! But fight it after victory is won." He threw the words into the room like a commander addressing troops.

Rodriguez relaxed slowly. "I accept," he said.

"And I." Carrera bowed.

"Right. Then I am your officer, Colonel Rodriguez, and Carrera is my second-in-command. Let us have no more foolishness."

Rodriguez reached for his wine. His face was the face of a man who has tasted that which is bitter.

"*Viva la patria!*" he said.

"*Viva la patria!*" Carrera, too, drank.

Archer looked into the eyes of Ysabel Rodriguez. Her soft lips framed a word: "Bravo."

Everyone was standing and the parley was over. Rodriguez was sulky, aloof. "We march tomorrow," he said. "See to your equipment."

He turned on his heel. Archer and Carrera bowed to Señorita Ysabel, retrieved their sidearms from the table and left. Carrera led the way purposefully around the house. There were six men loafing on the grass in the patio

who looked at them without interest. Behind the house there was a white wall. Carrera walked up to it and poked his finger curiously into several of the many holes which scarred it. His expression was thoughtful, his eyes, when he raised them, almost dreamy.

"Thank you, *amigo,*" he said softly.

The two men turned and there was a light patter of feet through the patio. Ysabel Rodriguez came through the gate. She was still wearing the tight blue breeches, the shiny boots, of a cavalry officer. She wore a cape that hung carelessly across her shoulders.

"Colonel Archer," she said, "I would see you alone."

Carrera clicked his heels, bowed low. "*Buenos noches,*" he said and was gone with the echo of his words.

ARCHER walked beside Ysabel Rodriguez behind the white wall and down a sloping path to the tree-lined river that raced noisily down from the mountains to irrigate the plains. There was a high, silver moon and the breath of summer here, far from the icy heights of Paso del Diablo. The girl came scarcely to the man's shoulder and that fact, for some strange reason, disturbed him.

"You are very brave, señor," she said.

"Brave men are no novelty to you."

"Maybe no. Most courage is stupid. One grows tired of stupid things. You have a bravery that is wise."

Archer laughed and in his laughter there was the bitterness of a memory that he was trying to forget. "So wise that it scattered the bones of good men all over the Andes."

"God willed that they should die there. If you had not brought them to the place where he had ordained that they should die, then he would have sent another to bring them."

"It is a comforting philosophy."

"It is truth. But I am weary of death."

"And I."

"I want to talk to you of Chile."

"Who is a beautiful woman."

"Ah, yes. Assuredly Chile is a woman. Why else should men go mad for her?"

"Men go mad for you, too?"

"I am a soldier."

"And a beautiful woman."

"I talk to you as a soldier—as one soldier to another."

"As you will it."

They sat together on the bank of the stream where water leaped high for the glory of being a reflector for one fractional second of the lancing moon beams that slashed from bank to bank. Of all the rushing tons of water only a comparatively few drops were touched even momentarily by glory; the rest rushed darkly on to some unknown rendezvous in the great, silent plains beyond. Ysabel Rodriguez cupped her chin in her hand.

"When the Spaniards are driven out," she said, "people will be weary of us because we remind them of war. They will turn to politicians who have never been warriors."

"Probably."

"Then all ambition in fighting men is vain. I have always felt so. I am glad that you said what you did to my brother and to Don Miguel. Chile wants only their bones; it will seek later for brains in men who do not fight."

"Is that your beautiful woman who will not have a man who follows mistresses?"

She raised her dark eyes to him. "Of course. Chile is a woman who is immortal. What woman, were she immortal, would not have many lovers?"

"Would you?"

"I am a soldier."

He swept her to him suddenly and kissed her, feeling the yielding softness of her, conscious of flooding flame in his veins. For a moment, she yielded, then suddenly she was strong as a steel blade. She twisted her body deftly and was free.

"I am not an Indian village, Colonel Archer, to be stormed with force."

"You are lovelier than your immortal Chile who sets men mad."

"*Gracias.* You speak nicely. But save your madness for Chile, señor. She needs it and I do not."

"And after the victory?"

"I know not, nor do you. We will return as we came; soldiers, not anything else."

Archer was both stirred and baffled. He stared at her but her eyes were coldly impersonal and he could not guess what thoughts paraded behind them.

She laughed at his confusion and her laughter was like music. "Talk to me of cavalry and guns," she said.

They walked back through the flooding moonlight and when Archer reached his own quarters, he found Carrera pacing the floor. Carrera looked at him slyly, one eyebrow raised.

"It was once whispered throughout Chile," he said, "that the luck of Rodriguez was his sister. If she should lose her heart to a man, then the luck would go from him."

Archer had heard that same legend before. He thrust his jaw out. "What about it?"

Carrera chuckled. "His luck runs out at a perfect time for me."

Archer sat down and started to pull off his boots. He chose to ignore the obvious implication in Carrera's words. "You make me sick, you and Rodriguez," he said. "It is a tragedy when any government, even a bad one, falls, because then good men slaughter each other for the right to succession. There is no sense to it."

Carrera shrugged. "That, señor, is the way of patriots."

Archer bent over his boot and the little gold medal of the fool fell to the floor. It landed face down and the inscription within the shield leaped to his eye as words to his ear.

Causes survive their champions.

CHAPTER XV

TO THE LAST MAN!

A COURIER who had raced with the winds from Cuesta de Chacabuco, nearly a hundred miles to the north, came reeling into camp in the dawn. He flung himself from his spent horse where Rodriguez was standing with Archer and Carrera.

"They are engaged," he said. "O'Higgins has smashed two armies in the passes and San Martin comes down from the north. But the Spaniards are strong on the heights of Chacabuco and more troops are on the march from Santiago."

"And O'Higgins? How strong is he?" The voice of Rodriguez was sharp.

"Strong enough to take Chacabuco, probably. If reinforcements reach the Spaniards in time from Santiago, he may be cut off from San Martin."

The eyes of Rodriguez blazed. "That, then, is our appointment. We meet these Spaniards from Santiago."

"How many Spaniards?" Carrera was cautious.

"What matters it? They must be stopped."

The two Chilenos were facing each other again, hotly belligerent.

Archer made a weary motion with his right hand. "If we stay here long enough and argue about it," he said, "it will not matter much how many Spaniards there are."

Rodriguez shook himself, turned away from Carrera. "We move immediately. In three commands. We make a fan. Colonel Archer in the center, I moving on the left ribs closest to Santiago. Major Carrera on the right."

"I am Colonel Archer's second and a lieutenant-colonel." Carrera's voice was sharp.

"To me you are nothing. Ride to your troops, señors!"

Rodriguez mounted his own horse; Archer and Carrera rode together to their commands. The men were ready, standing by their mounts. In the soft light of dawn, to eyes now rested, it was immediately apparent how magnificently Rodriguez had bluffed, how doubtful was his power if he had not planned carefully.

His Black Hussars were the pick of the troop. They wore their *serapes* on their left shoulders like the capes of Hungarians, but they were not armed as Hussars. They were lancers, with the *macana*, war club, as an auxiliary weapon. With the exception of about ten *mestizos*, they were all Indians: Araucanians, with round faces, narrow foreheads and small eyes. There were about fifty of them, all told.

The Indians were as irregular as troops could be. They numbered a rough hundred. Less than half of them were

leather-clad *soldado de cuero,* the rest wore the traditional *chiripa* which is a one piece garment like a night shirt, joined between the legs and drawn in at the waist. Their weapons were lances, clubs and bows.

Carrera looked at them with disgust. "Marco del Pont should be able to send a thousand troops from Santiago," he said. "This comes from lacking gold, *amigo.*"

"We had gold!"

Archer waved to his own force and Carrera's: fifty-five Americans, forty-nine Chilenos. The once smart uniforms were in rags and had been added to according to each man's taste and luck.

Many of the animals had died and had been replaced with the tough close-coupled Indian horses. There was little uniformity of men or mounts, but they had weapons. Few of the fragile pistols had survived but the men had carbines and sabers.

Carrera shrugged. "Under our own command we are still magnificent," he said.

Rodriguez had his men in motion. Archer moved forward down the middle, Carrera swung wide to the right. From a military standpoint it was an unwieldy force — all the weight concentrated on the left wing. In this case, however, unless the Spaniards moved very fast, that left wing would meet them first. Rodriguez had a definite objective. He had to put his men between Santiago and the Cuesto de Chacabuco and he had picked the place for his stand.

Through a hot dusty day they traveled fast and in the late afternoon they heard the sullen boom of distant firing in the north. Men stirred in their saddles and a wave of anticipation swept through the ranks. The Army of the Andes was in Chile with its challenge to the might of Spain.

THEY were a cloud of dust on the distant horizon when the men of Rodriguez topped a hill in the rolling *sabana.* On another hill, north and east of the dust-covered Spanish columns the sun touched a cluster of adobe houses surrounded by an adobe wall.

An officer of Rodriguez rode up to Archer at a gallop. "We engage," he said. "You must not reinforce us. Take that village and hold it!"

"Right!"

Archer spurred his own men on. The Spanish column was a larger cloud now and the dust rolled under the hooves of Rodriguez' cavalcade. Archer's courier reached Carrera with the relayed message and the Chilenos swung their column from the north toward the village.

It was a race now. As Archer's men came within range of the village, arrows flew around them. The Indians of Rodriguez came to grips with the Spanish vanguard. Archer heard the first burst of Spanish fire, but he had no time for any engagement save his own. There were Indians in this village he must take. They were resisting and he had no time to argue with them.

Suddenly there was a ragged burst of rifle fire from the adobe wall. A Spanish garrison, too! He had not anticipated that. Two of his men pitched from their saddles. He drew his saber and waved the rest of them on.

"To the wall and storm it!"

There were more arrows but the shooting was bad. Carrera came down from the north and now he, too, was drawing fire. Archer's men came like a whirlwind and their very speed saved them casualties. At the wall, they hit the ground in running dismounts and went up zouave fashion to the attack. Those who still possessed pistols fired them at the defenders, but most of them, like Archer himself, depended upon steel.

A blue-coated Spaniard with a fixed bayonet slashed at Archer from the wall. Archer parried and thrust. He went over the man's body into the village street and the defenders were already throwing down weapons. In three minutes of street fighting it was over.

The garrison had been a pitiful one—a dozen indolent Spaniards and some forty Indians that they had never dared to arm adequately. The village itself, however, was a veritable fort; a relic of the days when the Indian still was

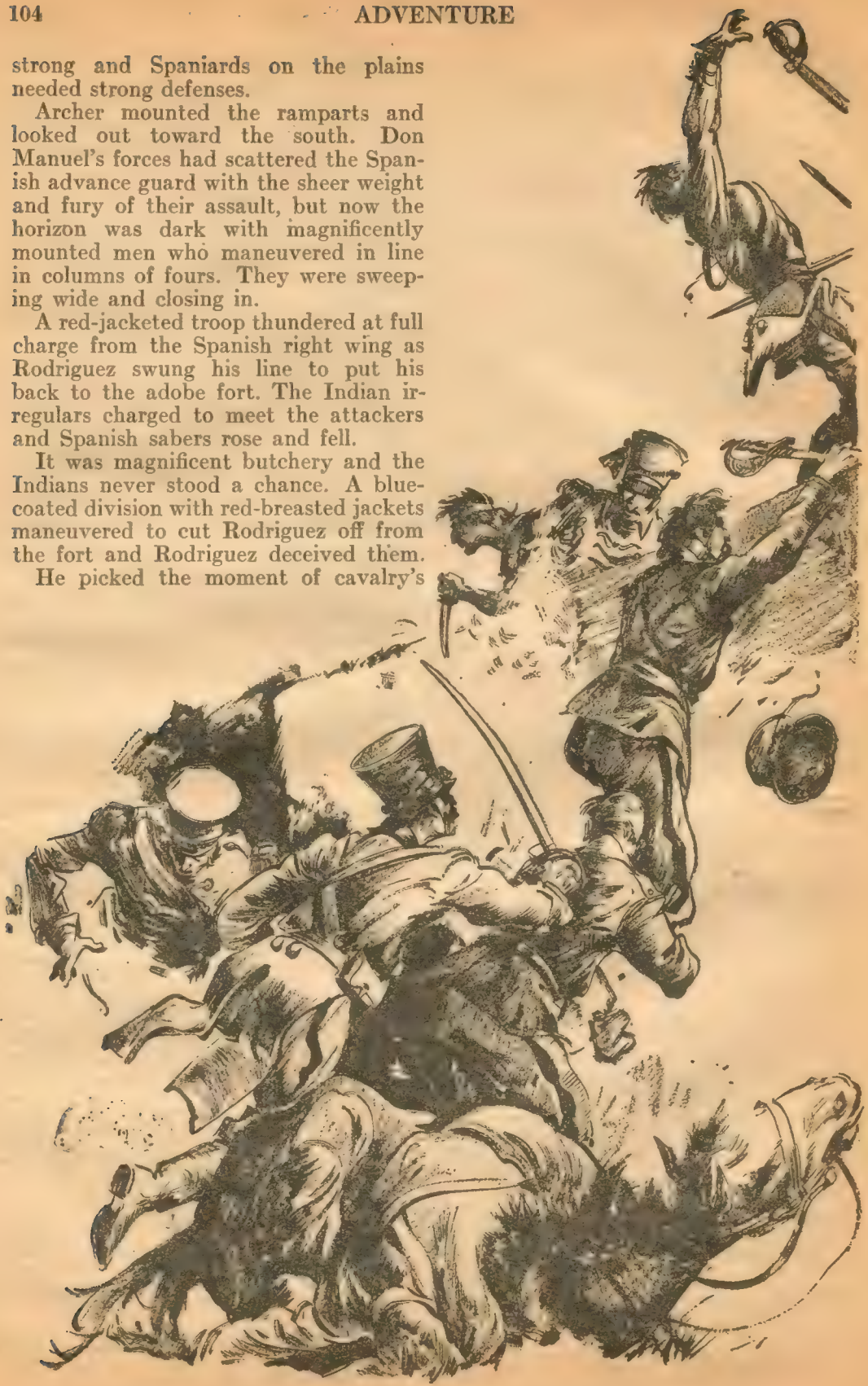
strong and Spaniards on the plains needed strong defenses.

Archer mounted the ramparts and looked out toward the south. Don Manuel's forces had scattered the Spanish advance guard with the sheer weight and fury of their assault, but now the horizon was dark with magnificently mounted men who maneuvered in line in columns of fours. They were sweeping wide and closing in.

A red-jacketed troop thundered at full charge from the Spanish right wing as Rodriguez swung his line to put his back to the adobe fort. The Indian irregulars charged to meet the attackers and Spanish sabers rose and fell.

It was magnificent butchery and the Indians never stood a chance. A blue-coated division with red-breasted jackets maneuvered to cut Rodriguez off from the fort and Rodriguez deceived them.

He picked the moment of cavalry's



Archer drew his saber and waved the rest of them on. "To the wall - and storm it!"

greatest weakness for an assault. The red jackets having scattered the Indian irregulars were pulled up from their own charge, out of formation, momentarily spent from their labors. At that second, Rodriguez charged them with his Black Hussars.

The Hussars went in with lances down and the Spaniards had no time for firearms. They met lances with sabers and the lance is a vicious weapon when the saber lacks the momentum of the charge.

The blue jackets, seeing their comrades faced with annihilation came in at a gallop. Archer turned from the wall. His men had brought their horses in through the gate in the barricade and they were ready. He drew his sword and mounted his horse with a shout.

His Americans had tasted combat and they were ready. They poured out behind him and he never looked back. There is no sensation known to man like the wild, full gallop of a cavalry charge—saber in hand and death only a few yards away. Archer felt the wind in his face, saw the beards of Spaniards, then he was slashing with his saber. Parry and thrust! He turned a blade that would have taken his head off and the tip of his own steel opened a Spanish throat. He rode on.

Horses and men wheeled now in wildest confusion. The lancers, having charged right through the demoralized red coats had turned. Archer's Americans had smashed the rhythm of the blue-jacket charge and it was man to man and horse to horse.

Archer's horse staggered and went down. He was on a riderless Spanish horse in an instant, his weapon still in his hand.

Rodriguez was shouting and every man who heard the order took up the shout.

"To the fort!"

They were breaking off combat, racing individually back where they had charged in force. Archer crossed sabers with a bearded giant, as handsome as a glorified oil painting of a conquistador. He sent the other's sword spinning with the same reverse that he had used on Rodriguez at Recoleta and with the flat

of his blade he smashed the other from the saddle. "To the fort!"

He took up the cry of Rodriguez and lined out for the sanctuary of that adobe wall. Carrera's men were already on the ramparts with carbines to cover them and the horizon rolled with the dust of Spaniards as more men from Santiago came up.

A FEW stout Spaniards followed the fleeing rebels but the carbines cracked spitefully and their officers were shouting at them, ordering them back out of range to reform.

Archer flung himself out of the saddle inside the ramparts. His throat was choked with dust and his eyes watered. He was glad that it was so when he looked around. It is not good for men to see commanders weep.

Only twenty-one Americans had come back.

The Indians of Rodriguez had been all but annihilated; the Black Hussars had fared better. The command had, in all, about one hundred and fifty men.

Out on the plain the Spaniards were forming their lines again. They were cavalry, real cavalry. They had suffered losses but they had slain more than they lost and more men were coming up. Officers conferred out of range of the fort. They knew that not all of their foes had been engaged and they were not certain of the strength opposing them. The storming of redoubts is work for infantry and they were a force designed to travel fast and maneuver on the open plain.

Rodriguez was slapping his thigh with his glove. "We have cost them blood. I know the Spaniard," he said. "They will not go until they have wiped us out."

He was completely unafraid, even jubilant, as though in being wiped out, he was fulfilling his highest destiny. Archer looked at him in wonderment. It was so hard to understand these Latins. They would waste time and energy in quarrels over prestige and command while there was a chance of coming through a campaign alive; but when, by dying, they could insure a rival's triumph over a common enemy, they faced death cheerfully. He shook his head and looked out over the plain.

There were at least six hundred mounted Spaniards out there now, drawn up in the shape of a half moon and awaiting orders. That force, with one determined charge, if it were willing to accept its losses, would annihilate the combined commands of Archer, Carrera and Rodriguez.

It seemed a heavy price to pay for delaying so briefly the march of these reinforcements to Cuesta de Chacabuco.

Rodriguez turned and snapped a command. In a few minutes a black flag fluttered from the tip of a lance atop the church steeple in the heart of the village. Carrera looked at it glumly.

"It means 'To the last man,'" he said. "No quarter asked or given. Seldom does a Spaniard overlook such a challenge."

Carrera seemed gloomy but Archer felt that it was not the fear of death that oppressed him, but his absence of command. If bold gestures were made, Carrera wanted to make them.

Men crouched at the barricades clutching their weapons and watching the Spaniards. In the north the booming of cannon was louder. One division of Spanish cavalry started north at that. Rodriguez cursed.

Archer moved along the wall. In one niche he found Señorita Ysabel. Her face was smeared with reddish brown dust, but her lips curved softly in greeting.

"You have come to say good-bye, no?"

"No. I think we are coming out of it. Did you fight out there with the rest?"

She shook her head. "No. My brother sends me out of the fighting. It is unfair. All else I do." Her eyes lighted. "This next fight he cannot send me away. It is the last fight of all."

Archer nodded. "Perhaps. Still I will not say good-bye."

He moved away again. The Spaniards seemed to have reached a decision. More men came up from Santiago, more cavalry moved north. A force of some sixty dragoons dismounted and moved

forward crouching, carbines in hand, toward the fort. A few of the riflemen on the ramparts fired but the range was short. The dragoons went down on their stomachs and inched forward. They concentrated twenty rifles in a line with the gate through which cavalry must charge and tried the range, driving the heads of the defenders down from the wall.

Rodriguez was a cursing madman. "The cowards besiege us!" he said. "They dare not attack."

Archer did not see where daring had anything to do with it. The Spaniards had their orders. San Martin to the north was sweeping down through their best garrisons. If he joined O'Higgins before the army of O'Higgins was destroyed, or if O'Higgins smashed through the defenders on the heights of Chacabuco, then the cause of Spain in Chile was lost. The stakes were too high to be jeopardized by a prideful assault upon a handful of men in a miserable adobe fort. Let the main objective be won and they could be mopped up at leisure.

More dragoons rode up, dismounted and eased forward, carbines in hand. They were on two sides of the fort now. From the fort, itself, higher than the surrounding plains, it was possible to see in all directions. Like a human tide, the might of Spain flowed past it: chasseurs, lancers, *granaderos-a-caballo*.

CHAPTER XVI

FLAGS ABOVE THE DUST

INSIDE the fort impotent fury swept men and officers. The dismounted dragoons covering the gate were increased in number but no other Spanish troops were immobilized. The charge out would be a futile sacrifice; to stay would mean to die at Spanish convenience. No Latin having hoisted the black flag would haul it down again. The Spanish legions riding by looked at it grimly and they would remember.

So it went through the morning but as the sun climbed to the zenith the cannonading in the north became sharper, more thunderous. The Spaniards were moving faster now, with greater urgency. Just before noon, the first of the infantry showed, marching stolidly across the plain. The last of the cavalry was gone save for a small body of dragoons, still mounted and watching the fort which was encompassed by riflemen. A dragoon officer rode to meet the infantry and the siege passed to other hands; the infantry relieving the dragoons who retreated slowly to their horses.

Shots from the ramparts harried the relief but any attempt to sally out was madness. Rodriguez paced, slapping his leg with his glove. "I rode into this box," he said. "A curse upon my stupidity."

"You would be lying out there for Spaniards to ride over if you had not reached this box." Archer was grimly realistic. A fierce hope still burned in him.

He had been listening to the firing in the north and for two hours it had been coming ever closer.

Rodriguez continued to pace up and down. "We must be patient," he said. "To die is not enough. A man's life should purchase the destruction of his enemy."

Carrera looked at him suspiciously, then quietly made the rounds of his own men; grouping them together in one command at their own section of the ramparts. Archer followed his example and drew his Americans around himself. There existed, then, three separate commands within the fort; the Spaniards outside were a single command. If they had known it, however, the Chilenos of the north were in five commands.

O'Higgins knew well the importance of taking Cuesta de Chacabuco and of permitting no strong Spanish infiltration between San Martin and himself. Chacabuco rose like a spur out of a desert of mesquite and chapparal, a rocky natural fortress, seemingly invincible on two sides, but vulnerable where winding water courses and low hills offered cover for attackers. O'Higgins, with half of his force divided again into halves stormed Chacabuco itself, seconded by Colonel Zapola: but a full half of the

entire attacking army was sent under Colonel Freyre to by-pass the hill entirely and come out upon the plains beyond it, cutting off aid from Santiago and serving notice on the defenders of Chacabuco that they were surrounded.

The men in the fort with Rodriguez, of course, knew nothing of this strategy, but shortly after one o'clock the results of it became apparent. Shattered remnants of once proud Spanish cavalry appeared upon the plain before the fort, many of the horses loaded double, their riders carrying wounded comrades in the saddle. At the same time the roll of musketry sounded from only a few miles away, the source hidden by a fold in the *sabana* and by the trees lining a watercourse northward.

Rodriguez leaped up and down with excitement. "They are driven back! The Spanish are driven back!" he shouted.

"Steady! This may be only part of the force." Archer's eyes, too, gleamed with excitement.

It was hard to sit there behind the ramparts. Occasional savage volleys sounded beyond the line of vision, then gaps in the story that sound told. The cavalry would be charging, of course, and steel is wordless.

In an hour there was no doubt. The Spanish retreat was a rout. They debouched upon the plain in wild disorder, a gallant army that, taken on its flank by determined patriots, had been unable to maneuver or make a stand.

One leader of a fairly compact force of the *granaderos-a-caballo* seemed overcome with fury at seeing the adobe fort and its black flag in the path of his retreat. He gave an order to charge and his men, stung by the ignominy of the retreat, responded with loud yells of "Santiago!"

There were fifty or sixty of them and they came like the wind. Archer's men held the ramparts in their path.

Archer stiffened. "Hold your fire till you can count their buttons!" he said.

The men held coolly. Rodriguez and a dozen of his men, aching for action rushed to back up the Americans. The earth shook to the charge, the snorting horses were almost to the barricade and then the volley rang out.

A dozen saddles emptied at once, horses stumbled and went down, the charge came on. The Spaniards threw themselves from the saddles, even as Archer's men had done, and hurled themselves at the barricades, sabers swinging.

The Indians of Rodriguez clubbed them down and the sabers of Americans and Chilenos cut them to pieces as they came over the wall. They died to a man and they took only eleven defenders with them.

Out on the plain other Spanish officers, tired and dull-eyed, stared with disapproval at the rash charge of their comrades, but held their men in check. What was an adobe fort at a time like this?

Marco del Pont's officers, however, were not taking forts now. They were trying to bring order to the retreat, trying to get their army back to Santiago. The infantry was withdrawn from its siege of the adobe fort and sent on the march again. Cavalry, flowing on two sides of it, made the gentle hill upon which the adobe stood an island of defiance: but that cavalry was reforming into regiments, opening aisles through which the wounded and their escorts could pass on the way to sanctuary.

BY THREE o'clock the Spanish officers had the added problem of refugees from Chacabuco which O'Higgins had successfully carried at 1:30. Cavalry, infantry and the survivors of artillery, without their guns, poured down onto the plain in dismal retreat. Beyond the watercourse, unseen by the watchers in the adobe, the cream of Spanish cavalry was fighting a stubbornly courageous rearguard action against the army of Colonel Freyre: fighting no longer for victory, merely for time.

Archer looked curiously at Carrera who had paused for a moment beside him on the ramparts. "You never believed in your heart," he said, "that you, with a handful of men, would win Chile from these Spaniards?"

Carrera did not smile. "My genius is not military," he said.

"You wanted merely to place yourself in a position to bargain with the new government?"

Carrera shrugged. "It is the irony of history, *amigo*, that nations are freed by men whose only talent is the command of troops. I, who command troops badly, could lead a nation well."

He rose and strolled away with his head down as though he realized at last that he would never again lead Chile. Archer rose. He was feeling a certain foreboding of doom himself and he did not know why. He went down the wall to where Ysabel Rodriguez crouched alone, looking out upon the plain. She looked up when he stopped and her face flushed.

The face of Rodriguez was lighted with a fierce joy, his eyes gleamed—then suddenly the light went out of them.

"You frightened me," she said.

"I would never want you to be frightened." His voice was gentle. "For some reason I had to come. This time I will say good-bye."

She gripped his fingers tightly, her eyes wide. "No, *amigo*. No. Not you."

The fear in her voice told him more

than he was ready at the moment to hear. He lifted her fingers to his lips and kissed them.

"It was worth coming here to know you," he said. He turned abruptly and went back the way he had come.

On the plain all things raced to a climax. Couriers had come riding hard with the news that O'Higgins had joined Freyre and that San Martin, having crushed all opposition northward, was within the carrying sound of a bugle of his general. The Spanish rearguards could hold no longer.

The Spanish colonel, with his officers grouped around him, took the news without a change of expression. He drew his cavalry south on the plain before the adobe and lined them up for a charge. They sat there then in their saddles and waited for O'Higgins and Freyre.

Bugles blew where the horizon was broken by the folding ground and the high trees northward and then the patriot army of Bernardo O'Higgins broke upon the plain—a tide of victorious cavalry riding at the lope, sun glinting upon the tips of their lances.

Four hundred grim Spaniards waited for them beneath the battle flags of Castile. In the adobe fort, beneath the black pennant of "No Surrender" a scant hundred ragged irregulars stood by their horses.

Suddenly the thin notes of a single trumpet sounded. The magnificent Spanish cavalry, in line and column of fours, started to move: gently at first like a wave seen far out on a placid sea, then faster, more furious, working up to the awe-inspiring terror of the full charge. The prairie shook under the pounding of 1600 hooves, and dust rose in a cloud.

From the north the warriors of Mendoza, the Army of the Andes, rode to the challenge. In the adobe fort Rodriguez chuckled, his voice as shrill as a woman's. "The gate! Mount, men of liberty! *Viva la patria!*"

The great gate swung wide, men leaped to their saddles and another javelin of living flesh flashed to the dust clouds of battle. Archer trembled to the quiver of a horse's body against his knees, choked with the mad excitement of the wild rush into the wind that stirred the pennants.

"Santiago!"

"Viva la patria!

Then, the shock of impact. The ragged irregulars from the adobe fort smashed into the Spanish flank just an instant before the lines of Spaniards and patriots met. The irregulars were few but their momentum was great and the Spanish flank buckled. Steel blades rose, flashed, turned red.

Horses crashed together out there on the plain and screamed as they went down, throwing their riders beneath the relentless hooves of the continuing stampede. Dust was the merciful mantle of horror—and then suddenly it was over. Spanish desperation broke itself against patriot might, reeled desperately for a time in stubborn denial of its fate, then broke piecemeal. The hoarse shouts of "Santiago!" grew weaker and the chorus of freedom swelled above it.

"Viva la patria!"

IT WAS over and men shouted with joy when they realized it. Archer all but overtook Carrera, still riding proudly, but the erstwhile general's face was grimly intent and he did not see him. From a milling group of irregulars who fought their own frightened horses, Rodriguez rode and this was the rendezvous that had been set in the house in San Vicente where a bullet-packed wall had awaited José Miguel Carrera.

The two men saw each other at the same instant and their voices shouted as one. "Now! On guard, señor!"

As they had charged Spaniards so did they charge each other. Their sabers flashed, rang together, struck weird sparks. Archer was too far away to intervene. He spurred toward them and he was looking into the face of Rodriguez: the man who loved a duel and who believed that a man who deserved to win never lost one. The face of Rodriguez was lighted with a fierce joy, his eyes gleamed—

Then suddenly the light went out of them.

Señor Don José Miguel Carrera,

thrusting swiftly after a parry, ran him through. His blade buried itself to the hilt and the body of Rodriguez, twisting in swift agony, tore it from his hand as he plunged from the saddle.

Carrera straightened. He turned in the saddle but saw no one. Triumph, blazing unashamed in his eyes, blinded him to everything save that he had killed his enemy.

It blinded him to the nearness of a little man with dark eyes who, once a lieutenant, wore now the stripes of a sergeant of the blue uniform of the Army of the Andes. Juan Garcia looked at him, lifted a pistol and shot him coolly in the back.

Archer struck then, struck for the last time in this battle. His saber took from the saddle a man that he liked, a man who had stooped to assassination and lost the right to live. Juan Garcia saw whose blade cut him down and his eyes were wide with horror. Archer's face was grimly set and there was no emotion in him. He caught the reeling Carrera.

Details were blurred then until he sat beside Don Miguel in a house of adobe inside the barricades they had held together. Carrera looked up at him from a pile of straw.

"I am dying, *amigo*."

Archer nodded. "Probably!"

Carrera pondered that, his eyes staring at the ceiling. " 'Tis as well," he said. "Rodriguez, too, I killed him. Chile wanted neither of us." His lips twisted hard. "But, mark you, I died for Chile. A Spanish bullet."

Archer nodded. There was no point in the cruelty of telling him that he had reaped his own sowing, that he had been assassinated by a man whom he had once marked for assassination. Carrera's voice was weak now, but there was pride in it.

"This is the end. Am I not a patriot now and you mistaken? I ventured all. To the end, I held back nothing that would serve Chile. Did I have to venture that charge? Gold, men, suffering, death. Señor Archer, *amigo*, say it! Am I not a patriot?"

Archer's lips were dry. "General Carrera," he said huskily, "you are a great patriot. I am proud that I served under you."

"*Gracias*." Carrera smiled faintly, closed his eyes.

Archer rose to his feet. Outside there was a great clamor and shouting. Men spoke to him and he scarcely heard them. He learned, somehow, and forgot how, that six of his Americans survived. Six out of one hundred and fifty that had fared forth so gallantly. And they had been called mercenaries.

He learned, too, that Colonel Danning had died leading a charge up the slopes of Cuesta de Chacabuco. He felt no shock, nothing. He was seeking something that he could not name through the fog that settled on his brain.

IN A corner of the adobe wall he found her, Ysabel Rodriguez, standing like a tiny soldier with her back against the wall. Her eyes swam in tears and she sobbed one word and he took her silently into his arms.

"My brother!" she said. "It was my fault. I betrayed him."

Archer knew what she meant. It was whispered throughout Chile that when Ysabel Rodriguez gave her heart to a man she withdrew the luck of Rodriguez. He patted her shoulder and gradually his brain cleared.

A great victory had been won. There were battles yet to be fought and the destiny of San Martin would lead him north to Lima and the Vice-Royalty of Peru. O'Higgins would rule Chile which his patience and his bravery had set free, with the aid of lesser men whose blood lived on in the red slash across the flag of Chile.

Crowds cheered in the narrow streets of the adobe village over which the black flag of "To the last man" still fluttered. The sun was gone and it was dark but the shouts rose high. "*Viva la patria!*" Chile was free. He held the girl close.

"Causes survive their champions," he said, "and that is better. The champions would be restless with what they had won. Your brother knew that."

He was quoting the medal of the fool but he was not aware of it.

THE END

ILLUSTRATED BY PETER STEVENS

The Piutes watched him and let him pass. They respected courage in their enemies.

A FACT STORY

GLORY TO SPARE

By H. H. HAWKINS

WHEN the first air mail crossed the American skies, Artist "Ding" Darling drew a cartoon in which the ghost of a Pony Express rider, boots on the desk, reads that day's news headlines and says, "'Air Mail Saves Two Days'? Two days hell! *We* saved twenty!"

Individual Pony Express exploits were overshadowed at the time by the collective miracle that was the whole short-lived enterprise, and to name the top Pony Express feat of horsemanship or heroism is made hard now by the fact that in the 90's every half-baked badman in the West claimed to have ridden Pony. The impossible feats claimed by such men found their way into print and overshadowed the real deeds of the genuine—but modest—Pony riders.

There is at least one exploit accepted by all the historians, however, which belongs up among the champions: Pony Bob Haslam's great ride in May of 1860.

PONY BOB was twenty years old, a London Cockney by birth, and seems to have been a good-looking wiry little youngster of the type that outwears and outworks most six-footers. One end of his run was in the alkali desert of Nevada, the other end high in the Sierra Nevadas—as tough a stretch as any in the 1900-mile route from St. Joe to San Francisco.

Unlike other record-breaking rides, Pony Bob's started without special preparation. In fact, his routine day's ride was almost finished before anything unusual happened, and then it was more a case of what didn't happen, for he rode up to his last change-station, Reed's, to find no fresh horse waiting saddled. No one was there at all; no horses, no men.

Puzzled and annoyed, Pony Bob fed his tired horse and continued to the end of his run, Bucklands, where the Pony route leaves the river to cut straight across the salt-white desert. His righteous wrath at the stationmaster's neglect of duty was forgotten almost at once on encountering something far more serious. The new rider *was refusing to go.*

No emphasis can convey how serious that was to Pony men. For them the schedule was sacred. The tradition that the United States Mail must go through never existed before then; the Pony Express created it, and in its service made super-human, super-equine efforts regularly.

And now the Bucklands-Smith Creek rider was refusing duty—refusing it because he was afraid of Indians. White gamblers had stolen and abused some Indian women a few miles down the river, and the Piutes were on the warpath.

The historians say that the Pony Express never had but one coward in its ranks, and this was the one. His name, Johnson Richardson, survives those of better men because his cowardice occasioned Robert Haslam's heroism.

Pony Bob took the mail on.

Remember that he had earned the right to rest. What "riding Pony" meant in the way of getting every ounce out of man and horse can be judged by the fact that later the riders' runs were cut down by a third because even picked men could not keep up the pace for so long.

Also the danger was real.

Ironically enough, however, considering Richardson's hysterical fear, there was not a sign of Piutes all the way to Smith's Creek, where Pony Bob arrived about sunrise.

Up to that point he had ridden 185 miles in 16 hours, elapsed time, using nine different horses. That took horsemanship—it wasn't done just by sticking spurs in horses' sides—but it was not Pony Bob's record, and as he rode up to the Smith's Creek station he still had no idea that he was going to make a record.

At Smith's Creek he found a westbound mail waiting! And no one there to take it, since rider Jay Kelley must carry the eastbound *mochila* that Pony Bob was bringing.

Nine hours' sleep, and Pony Bob started back, computing that the return trip as far as Bucklands would bring his mileage up to a round 300 and feeling pretty good about it. This state of exuberance lasted thirty-five miles, to Cold Springs Station, where again no fresh horse was ready—but not through any neglect of duty this time. Two scalped bodies lay on the floor of the cabin.

Right there, the record ride ceased to be a sports event for young Bob Haslam. The waterless thirty-seven miles from Cold Springs to Sand Springs, on a jaded horse, under a feverish sun, and with that spectacle of violent death fresh in his mind, must have been the worst of the trip. At Sand Springs the frightened stationmaster accompanied him on to the Sink of the Carson, where they found fifteen settlers crowded into the tiny adobe fort that was the Pony Station, preparing for siege by a party of fifty Piutes who had been sighted. Pony Bob did not stay in the shelter of the four walls. He was carrying the mail.

Night had fallen and when he rode out of the fort, he saw nothing but the stars and heard nothing but his horse's hooves, and yet it is almost certain that Piutes watched him—and let him pass. The Piutes respected courage so greatly

(Continued on page 127)

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where readers, writers and adventurers meet

THE author of "Something to Shoot At" didn't dream up the reactions of a man under fire from his imagination. He enlisted in the Army, 34th Regular Infantry, when he was hardly more than a kid, and at the age when most boys are just starting their junior year in high school was already wearing three campaign ribbons and, incidentally, was in U. S. Base Hospital No. 87. Six months later, with a certificate of disability from the Army and the Military Order of the Purple Heart, he was back in high school. He spent the next several years finishing school and college, then turned to newspaper work and writing. Stories by him have been included in "Best Short Shorts of 1932" and in Harry Hansen's collection, "O. Henry Memorial Stories of 1940." About his first story to appear in our magazine Mr. Tracy says—

It grew out of two experiences, one personal, one told to me. The Philippine angle comes from ex-Sergeant Everett Evans, a neighbor of mine, here in Los Gatos, California, who put in four hitches in the Islands, two of them with the old 21st Infantry which was stationed for many years at Camp Keesley near Lake Lanao in northern Mindanao, that section where, at the time the story was written the Japs had not been able to penetrate, and where, we hope, a very unpleasant kind of guerrilla warfare still goes on. This is the locale of "Something to Shoot At."

Second: A sweaty muggy afternoon and a flanking company snarled in heavy scrub and tangled in bitter dirty bush-fighting with every man hidden and shooting from cover, the unseen rifles exploding sullenly from bush to bush, and a scared runner with sweat in his eyes, reporting to the Old Man that we had lost contact with the company on our right. That was a job for the liaison men and not a nice job. Floundering in the woods between two open flanks where the enemy may be anywhere and your friends may be nervous is a bad assignment. I was a liaison man and one of those who got it. When that tense "Halt! Who goes there?" came to me out of the underbrush in an accent that was unmistakably from somewhere south of St. Louis it made me very happy, and my happiness was not all due to our having reestablished contact. That trip is where those very concrete physical and psychological details of Sergeant Acuna's trek came from.

We are glad to welcome to our *Camp-Fire* a writer whose words are as strictly "G. I." as T. F. Tracy's are and hope we'll see a lot more of him in months to come.

VINSON BROWN and Theodore O. Zschokke collaborated on "Black Billions" but Brown was the only one of the pair we knew how to get in touch with, so he's responsible for the joint introduction below. If his writing partner has any kicks he'll have to make them to Brown personally. Here's how V. B. herds his pal up to the blaze—

Ted Zschokke and I got acquainted during a summer spent in the Colorado Desert of Southern California. We were both naturalists and we spent the 120 degree heat of the day lying in hammocks with hoses turned over us discussing Philosophy and Economics and the fate of the World, and the nights wandering the desert in search of insects and other wild life. He spent over a year after graduation from Stanford University at a rancho on the shore of Gatun Lake, in Panama, collecting and studying insects. This, theoretically, should make him my deadly enemy, he being a lowlander and a Stanford graduate, as I

(Continued on page 116)

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(Continued from page 114)

graduated from the University of California and spent two years in the mountains and highlands of Western Panama near the Costa Rican border, also collecting insects and other specimens as well as homesteading a jungle ranch.

We would both be in the Naturalist profession at present if it wasn't for the war, which has caused Ted to work in an aircraft factory in Southern California and me in the Westinghouse Electric Co. Plant in the East Bay here. We are both married, but so far I am the only one with any offspring, one lively boy. Ted is a little fellow, about five foot three, whereas I'm six foot three, but he packs the most dynamite.

Ted spent several years in the Philippines as a boy, whereas I shipped on a freighter after graduating from High School and worked as an ordinary seaman in and out of the ports of South China, Indo China and Malaysia. As a naturalist I have also journeyed through most of the mountains of the West.

Reading the story our curiosity was aroused by the handy qualities of almara or *almira* (both spellings occurred), for we felt that if the root could work such wonders against the driver ants of Bocas del Toro it might prove equally effective in discouraging our local Connecticut variety from preying on the sugar supply. What with rationing and all—it seemed a good idea at the time but from what Mr. Brown writes it doesn't look as though it's going to be practicable to try to persuade the neighborhood grocer to begin stocking the stuff. Here's what Brown tells us about the tropical anti-ant mixture—

"Almara" is a Guaymia Indian word for a root they use to drive away ants, or rather I should say I think that is the correct spelling for the word, but am not at all sure. I had a Guaymia Indian boy named Chio Jari working for me when I was in Panama and he showed me some of the root. The plant, from his description, possibly belonged to the Polygonaceae, but I have never seen it myself. Few of the Panama natives know of this root, or use this name; so it is no wonder you could not find it.

H. H. HAWKINS, you may recall, had something to say in this department a few issues ago when the Hawken-Hauken-Hawkins rifle controversy was waxing hot and heavy. "Glory to Spare" is her first appearance on our contents page.

Mrs. Hawkins writes—

My father was a Texas Ranger and my mother danced with Apaches who had war-paint on. My own life is quieter. I began reading up on the Pony Express with an idea of disguising them in a historical background, and found the real men and events of the Pony much more interesting on their own account.

For combined skill, courage and stamina, Pony Bob earned his No. 1 ranking, but was only "chief among equals." Some day I'd like to tell of some of the runners-up such as Jay Kelley, the stableboy who took over a dying man's run—or handsome Jim Moore, who rode 280 miles in 22 hours.

YOU'LL find a new name on our roster of *Ask Adventure* experts this month. Roy S. Tinney, for many years shooting editor of the old *Forest & Stream* magazine, has consented to answer queries for us on shotguns and wing shooting. This niche in our gallery of experts has been vacant since the death, last year, of P. H. Glover.

Mr. Tinney, a veteran wing shot, loaded ammunition for and hunted ducks with Grover Cleveland and General Miles. He studied gun-fitting at the London shooting schools and is well acquainted with the methods of manufacturing shotguns in England, Belgium and this country. During the last war he participated in the test firing that put the riot guns in the trenches. During the past five years he has done a lot of experimental and test firing with muzzle loading shotguns, both flint and percussion lock. He is well acquainted with punt guns and the outlaw bigbores used by the old market hunters and has installed several field layouts where clay pigeons simulate field conditions.

Incidentally, Mr. Tinney is a great crony of our rifle and revolver expert out in Oregon and has returned East only lately after a several months' visit with Ol' Man Wiggins. We are delighted to welcome him to the staff of our magazine.

(Continued on page 118)

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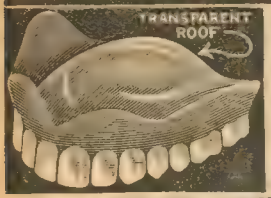

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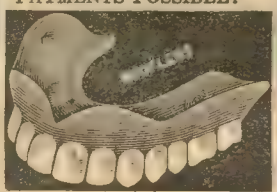

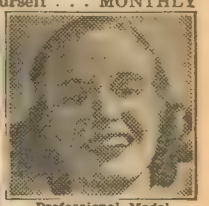

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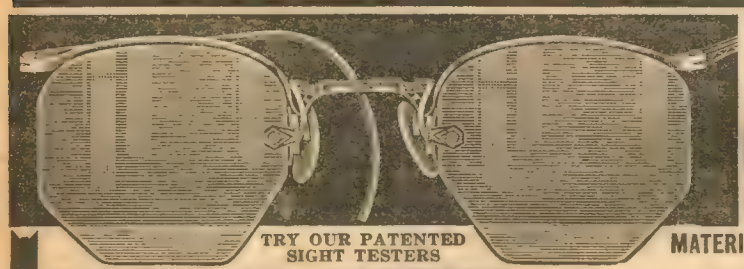

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(Continued from page 116)

COMMANDER Gladden tells us that "The Cat and the Perch" is based on fact. He writes—

> In July 1918 the R15 was on government acceptance trials. The civilian crew opened the torpedo tube door to reload a dummy torpedo while the outer door was open. A 21" stream of water with a hundred foot head shot into the compartment. The boat was saved by action similar to that discussed in the story.

GEORGE CORY FRANKLIN, who joins our Writers' Brigade this month with "The Infallible Nose of Corporal Blue," writes from his home in Victorville, Cal.—

> There isn't much to tell about myself. I began writing professionally about fifteen years ago and soon discovered that there were a lot of people who liked to read stories about animals. Since that time I have sold around a thousand short stories, quite a number of novelettes and have had two books published, as well as several stories filmed in Hollywood.
>
> Sometimes I find it difficult to convince readers that mules are smarter than horses and as intelligent as dogs; although most people know that a mule will not eat more than is good for him nor drink when he is hot. In this story Blue, undoubtedly, would have known more about the situation than I dared to bring out; in fact, not long ago I had to take a fact incident out of a mule story because it was decided to be beyond the credence of some readers.
>
> We winter on the edge of the Mojave Desert in a cowtown that is more like the Old West than any place I have seen for many years. Next summer we will be back in the Five Rivers country with our horses and mules, hob-nobbing with the few real old-timers that are left; and, I hope writing more stories for *Adventure.*

WE LIKE, every so often, to tip you off here in *Camp-Fire* to books by *Adventure* contributors, whether it's fiction and articles that have already appeared in our magazine or new material that didn't happen to get into these pages. Our Writers' Brigade and staff of *Ask Adventure* experts are men who don't like to let moss grow on the keyboards of their typewriters and you're apt to find them well represented on the

counters whenever you go prowling through your favorite bookstore. We've had a lot of pleasure the last few weeks getting caught up on some of this extra-editorial reading and see no reason why we should be selfish about telling you what some of it was. For instance—

Howard Bloomfield, whose initials appeared at the tail end of this department for so many years before we took over, has just had published "Sailing to the Sun." It's the account of his trip in the *Kittiwake* (you've heard about *her* before) by the Inland Waterway to Florida two years ago. We had the pleasure of making the first lap of the voyage with him as far as Delaware Bay and now the guy's gone and put us in print. Trying to infect us with the same itch he had, we suppose, when he decided to sail his thirty-foot sloop south and work off some of that editorial lard he'd acquired sitting in a swivel chair putting this magazine together twelve times a year. We can't say it isn't a tempting prospect, and if it wasn't for the war and if we had a sloop— For anyone who hankers after some pure escape reading (and who doesn't these days?) "Sailing to the Sun" is his dish. Bloomfield's delightful sense of humor makes the cruise of the *Kittiwake* an adventure in reading we wouldn't have missed for worlds. The book's chock full of swell photographs of the ship and her master, so if you're anxious to see what an editor looks like when he's not editing, as well as sign on for an exciting voyage under a skipper who knows his stuff, now's your chance. *(Dodd, Mead. $3.00).*

Walter Havighurst's tales in *Adventure* have all been deep-sea yarns, as near as we can recall, but in "The Long Ships Passing" he bids farewell—only temporarily, we hope—to salt water to tell the dramatic story of the Great Lakes. We keep a weather eye peeled to watch the weekly chart of "best-sellers" and haven't been surprised to find this absorbing book staying up among the top five leaders in the census taken in bookstores in Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit and other lake cities. It ought to be "discovered" and read more widely, for it's a grand job of writing. We think readers of this magazine who have had a chance to dip into and enjoy

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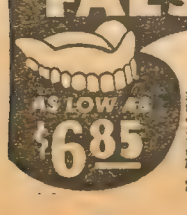

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Leslie T. White's "5,000 Trojan Horses" and Harry Oliver's "Nightly to Milwaukee" in the past few months will be particularly interested in the Havighurst book. It's a panoramic picture of life on and around these Seas of Sweet Water, as the Jesuit missionaries called them, from the time they were discovered and explored, down through the roaring lumber and iron eras to the present day. From the first birch bark canoe, freighted with fur, to the newest whaleback steaming down Superior with her tons of wheat or ore for the maw of war-time America, the fleets of three centuries and their amazing crews pass in review through the pages of this book. Excellent illustrations by John O'Hara Cosgrave II. *(Macmillan. $3.00)*

In the fiction field we were especially interested by Thomas Raddall's "His Majesty's Yankees" which, as are so many of the author's stories (Remember "The Drumlin of Joe Tom" back in our April issue?) is laid in his native Nova Scotia. Joe Tom was modern but this new novel is laid in the days of the Revolution and throws light on a little known facet of North American history, the stirring part played by the Yankees of Nova Scotia during the years we were becoming a nation. *Adventure* readers know Raddall's deft touch, his ability to tell a tale and breathe life into his characters. Here he demonstrates with striking success an ability to recreate a period of the past and infuse into it those qualities that make it live again in the present. A stirring yarn in the Kenneth Roberts tradition and one which Roberts himself recommends with unstinted praise. We go all the way with him. *(Doubleday, Doran. $2.75)*

R. W. Daly's Peter Dickoe stories, which appeared in these pages in 1941, have been expanded and tied together to make a consecutive novel. "Soldier of the Sea" is the title of the book and Gordon Grant, who illustrated the tales for us in the magazine, has done the jacket in color. Peter is just as good a character as he ever was. In fact, on second reading, that sterling young officer of His Majesty's Marines who confounded the French with his Commando tricks 150 years ago, seems to have

(Continued on page 125)

THE ASK ADVENTURE SERVICE is free, provided self-addressed envelope and FULL POSTAGE for reply are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries must enclose International Reply Coupons, which are exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.

Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to the magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The magazine does not assume any responsibility. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, financial backing or employment.

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Notice: Many of our *Ask Adventure* experts are now engaged in government service of one kind or another. Some are on active duty in the Army or Navy, others serving in an executive or advisory capacity on various of the boards and offices which have been set up to hasten the nation's war effort. Almost without exception these men have consented to remain on our staff, carry on their work for the magazine if humanly possible, but with the understanding that for the duration such work is of secondary importance to their official duties. This is as it should be, so when you don't receive answers to queries as promptly as you have in the past please be patient. And remember that foreign mails are slow and uncertain these days, many curtailed drastically. Bear with us and we'll continue to try to serve you as speedily as possible.

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

SPORTS AND HOBBIES

Archery—EARL B. POWELL, care of *Adventure.*

Baseball—FREDERICK LIEB, care of *Adventure.*

Basketball—STANLEY CARHART, 99 Broad St., Matawan, N. J.

Boxing—LIEUT. COL. JOHN V. GROMBACH, 1619 Mass. Ave. N.W., Wash., D. C.

Camping—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Canoeing: *paddling, sailing, cruising, regattas*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 1325 So. Main St., Princeton, Ill.

Coins: *and Medals*—WILLIAM L. CLARK, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., N. Y. C.

Dogs—FREEMAN LLOYD, care of *Adventure.*

Fencing—LIEUT. COL. JOHN V. GROMBACH, 1619 Mass. Ave., N.W., Wash., D. C.

First Aid—DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure.*

Fishing: *fresh water; fly and bait casting; bait; camping outfits; fishing trips*—JOHN ALDEN KNIGHT, 929 W. 4th St., Williamsport, Penna.

Fishing: *salt water, bottom fishing, surf casting; trolling; equipment and locations*—C. BLACKBURN MILLER, care of *Adventure.*

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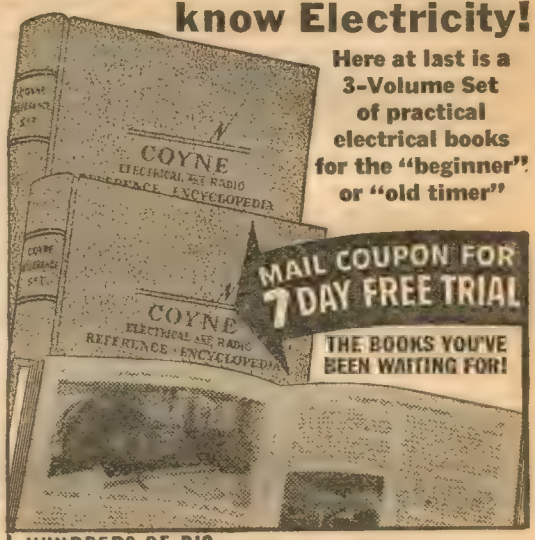

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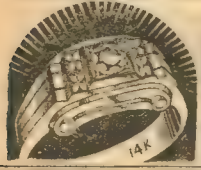

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Old-Time Sailoring—CHAS. H. HALL, 446 Ocean Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers: *foreign and American*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, 170 Liberty Rd., Salem, Oregon.

Shotguns, American and Foreign, Wing Shooting and Field Trials: ROY S. TINNEY, c/o *Adventure*.

★Skiing and Snowshoeing — W. H. PRICE, 3436 Mance St., Montreal, Quebec, Can.

Small Boating: *skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y. C.

Swords: *spears, pole arms and armor*—CAPT. R. E. GARDNER, care of *Adventure*.

Tournament Fly and Bait Casting—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, R. D. No. 1, Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—MURL E. THRUSH, New York Athletic Club, New York City.

Yachting—A. R. KNAUER, 2722 E. 75th Pl., Chicago, Ill.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology—*American, north of the Panama Canal, customs, dress, architecture; pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Aviation: *airplanes, airships, airways and landing fields, contests, aero clubs, insurance, laws, licenses, operating data, schools, foreign activities, publications, parachutes, gliders* — MAJOR FALK HARMEL, 709 Longfellow St., Washington, D. C.

Big Game Hunting: *guides and equipment*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Entomology: *insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, 465 E. Foster Ave., State College, Pa.

Forestry: *in the United States, national forests of the Rock Mountain States*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry: *tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, 1091 Springdale Rd., Atlanta, Ga.

Herpetology: *reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, care of *Adventure*.

Marine Architecture: *ship modeling*—CHAS. H. HALL, 446 Ocean Ave., Brooklyn N. Y.

Mining, Prospecting, and Precious Stones: *anywhere in No. America. Outfitting; any mineral, metallic or non-metallic*—VICTOR SHAW, 11628¾ Mayfield Ave., West Los Angeles, Calif.

The Merchant Marine—GORDON MACALLISTER, care of *Adventure.*

Ornithology: *birds; their habits and distribution*—DAVIS QUINN, 5 Minerva Pl., Bronx, N. Y.

Photography: *outfitting, work in out-of-the-way places; general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Radio: *telegraphy, telephony, history, receiver construction, portable sets*—DONALD MCNICOL, care of *Adventure.*

Railroads: *in the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure.*

Taxidermy—EDWARD B. LANG, 156 Joralemon St., Belleville, N. J.

Wildcrafting and Trapping — RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE

Federal Investigation Activities: *Secret Service, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, 43 Elm Pl., Red Bank, N. J.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police—ALEC CAVADAS, King Edw., H. S., Vancouver, B. C.

State Police—FRANCIS H. BENT, 43 Elm Pl., Red Bank, N. J.

U. S. Marine Corps—MAJOR F. W. HOPKINS, care of *Adventure.*

U. S. Navy—LIEUT. DURAND KIEFER, care of *Adventure.*

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

Philippine Islands — BUCK CONNER, Conner Field, Quartzsite, Ariz.

★New Guinea—L. P. B. ARMIT, care of *Adventure.*

★New Zealand: Cook Island, Samoa—TOM L. MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

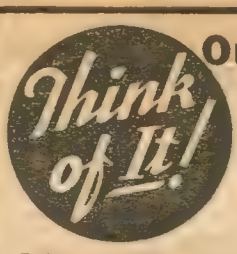
★Australia and Tasmania—ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandridge St., Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

★South Sea Islands—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, "Ingle Nook," 39 Cornelia St., Wiley Park, N. S. W.

Hawaii—JOHN SNELL, Deputy Administrator, Defense Savings Staff, 1055 Bishop St., Honolulu, Hawaii.

Madagascar—RALPH LINTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, New York City.

Africa, Part 1 ★*Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.* — CAPT. H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. **2** *Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya.* —GORDON MACCREAGH, 2231 W. Harbor Drive, St. Petersburg, Florida. **3** *Tripoli, Sahara caravans.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure.* **4** *Bechuanaland, Southwest Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa.*—MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER, care of *Adventure.* **5** ★*Cape Province, Orange Free State, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal, Rhodesia.*—PETER FRANKLIN, Box 1491, Durbin, Natal, So. Africa.



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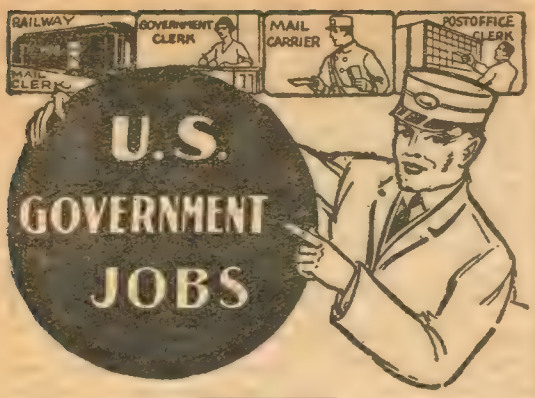

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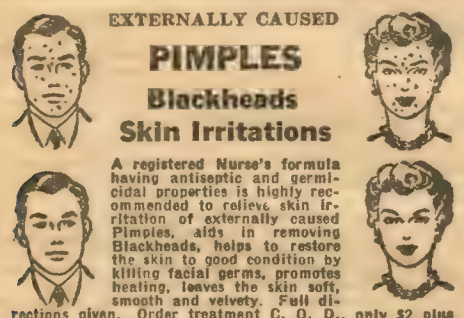

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(Continued from page 120)

grown a bit in stature since we met him first. *(Morrow. $2.50)*

L. L. Foreman's stories of the pioneer West, Indian fighters and mountain men, have been perennially popular in these pages for some time. "Hell and Hawkins" was the last and the one that started all that discussion here in *Camp-Fire* over early American gunsmiths. In "The Renegade" Foreman gives an exciting fictionization of Custer's Sioux campaign which culminates in the Little Big Horn engagement. It makes fine entertainment on its own account and stirring collateral reading for those who recall the author's "Riddle for a Red Man" in these pages. *(Dutton. $2.00)*

"The Boomer" by Harry Bedwell, who gave us "Indian Transfer," that hilarious saga of the railroader who lost his red flannels in the caboose, is another yarn of the men who ride the rails. A novel rich in iron-horse lore and crammed with the smell of steam and the sting of hot cinders it'll bring a thrill to the heart of any reader who ever stood at the trackside to watch the lights of a caboose vanish in the night—and wanted to race after them and climb aboard. *(Farrar & Rinehart. $2.00)*

Hugh B. Cave, with whom we'd rather go trout fishing than any man we know, has done a book for boys—"Fisherman Four"—that's got more sound fresh-water angling information than anything we've run across in a long time. If you have a son or know someone else's son you'd like to see get off on the right foot with his fishing education—and have fun doing it—steer him and this book together. *(Dodd, Mead. $2.00)*

WE'RE sitting here with our fingers crossed, wondering how you're going to feel *The Trail Ahead* looks this month. As we said, when this "Old Timers' Issue" plan was first promulgated, we knew we couldn't possibly expect to make everybody happy. But damned if we don't think there's a chance the disappointees are going to be scarcer than we thought they might. We haven't given you quite the whole picture on Page 128, so don't start hurling the brickbats and knobkerries till a month from now!—K.S.W.

To People who want to write

but can't get started

Do you have that constant urge to write but the fear that a beginner hasn't a chance? Then listen to what the editor of Liberty said on this subject:

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NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to Lost Trails will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and for women are declined, as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or for any other reason in the judgment of the editorial staff. No charge is made for publication of notices.

Robert Lee Johnson, 52, last heard of at Barron, Wis. in 1911. Prior to that had been at Leishman's Camp, Mile 48, A.C.R.R., had worked in railroad shops at Cape Girardeau, Mo. and on section at Barron, Wis. Later in Cal., Ariz., N. M. Talked of going to Alaska or South America. Anyone having knowledge of his whereabouts write P. O. Box 684, Oklahoma City, Okla.

Lewis Allen Hasty who left Coffeyville, Kan., seventeen years ago would like to hear from any member of his family. Write c/o Robert E. Mahaffey, Box 684, Oklahoma City, Okla.

Norman Rankin, 19, born in Glasgow, Scotland, resided in Brooklyn, N. Y., until 1934, last heard from at N. 3rd St., Philadelphia, Pa. Any information would be appreciated by Norman Bersin, Sea. 2/cl., U.S.N., c/o *Adventure*.

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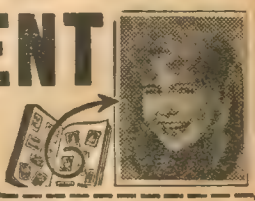

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(Continued from page 113)

that at the Pyramid Lake massacre, in that same month, they slew enemies who tried to flee but let brave men go unharmed.

Back at Bucklands, there being no one but the coward Richardson to replace him, Pony Bob took up Superintendent W. C. Marley's offer to double the $50 bonus already earned and, though he felt "rather tired," kept on over his own run all the way to Friday Station.

Robert Haslam had ridden 380 miles of alkali desert and mountain trail, in a total elapsed time of two days and two nights, with only eleven hours out of the saddle, bringing in the mail only three and one-half hours behind schedule.

NO DE-BUNKER has ever thrown a doubt on this story of courage and stamina. It is a story we would all like to have stand. But here comes trouble.

In the San Francisco *Bulletin* for June 2, 1860, a curious letter was published which seems to give the glory to somebody else!

> Placerville, May 31. Editor, Bulletin: You will oblige me by publishing the following tribute to the memory of a brave man:
>
> Bartholomew Riley died last night at Carson City of a rifle shot wound received at Cold Springs Station, on the Pony Express route, on the 16th of May. He had received an honorable discharge from Company E of the 10th Regiment of U. S. Infantry at Camp Floyd and was en route to California where he has brothers and sisters residing. When intelligence of the Indian outrage at Williams Ranch was first brought to Carson, he went with the expedition which was massacred at the Battle of Pyramid Lake. Among the last to leave the field, Riley did not reach Bucklands until near daylight, just as the express going east arrived, on the 15th of May. *The rider upon whom devolved the duty of going forward with the express shrinking from its performance, Riley, fresh from the battlefield, and tired as he was, stepped forward and volunteered to ride for the next change, a distance of 85 miles.* He did so in excellent time. On the following day, by the accidental discharge of a weapon in the hands of a friend, he received wounds from which he died last night.

(Continued on page 129)

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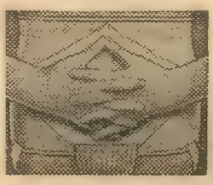

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THE TRAIL AHEAD

★

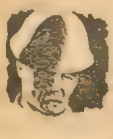
ALL-STAR OLD-TIMERS' ISSUE

W. C. TUTTLE, who's written more than 200 stories for us since that red-letter day back in March '15 when his name first appeared on our contents page, gives us "It's a Tough Life," the saga of Sawtooth Slade and Panamint Peters, and how they turned Peaceful Valley, Arizony, into a hilarious hell-on-earth. One of the all-fired funniest cowtown capers the Tuttle typewriter has ever turned out.

★

CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON, who hasn't been with us often enough lately, has done another story about Captain Bill Jett, that hard-bitten tropical sea tramp who flourished in these pages between '18 and '34. "A Gun for France" is the title—Free; not Vichy, naturally—and the setting's the Caribbean, mostly under its blue surface at the business end of a diving outfit.

★



SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL knows Japan. He began proving that in these pages back in Nov. '23 with "The Inn of the Silkworm-Moth," and has kept at it with few interruptions ever since. Next month in "Tokyo Drums" he takes us to Nippon in wartime, to let us watch the Shangri-La-based Yankee bombers swarm overhead while the yellow folk scuttle for safety among their blazing tissue-paper homes.

FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE, known to *Adventure* readers since '21 for a score or more Alaskan, Arctic and sea stories, gives us "Star-Gazer," a gripping tale of sabotage aboard a vessel in convoy to Arctic Russia.

And believing that new blood should be given a chance to mix itself with the printer's ink, even in an "Old-Timers' Issue," we take pleasure in announcing—

SHANGHAI POST-MORTEM

By Ernest O. Hauser

—a distinguished and thrill-packed tale of the last days in the International Settlement before the Japs took over. The author, for many years an authority on Oriental affairs, is now on his way to Chungking. He has written countless articles for other magazines—*Adventure* is pleased to present his first piece of fiction.

F. R. BUCKLEY, author of some seventy-odd stories in this magazine since he first appeared in '21, adds another gripping re-creation of a bygone period in "Of Magic" next month. It's a Cardosso novelette!

ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON, whose perfectly plotted adventure-mysteries—40 or more of them in all—began appearing here early in '28, gives us "Down to Brass Tacks," a South Seas murder yarn with as neatly satisfying a bit of marine detective work as we've encountered in many a gibbous moon.

★

ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN—and we don't need to remind you who *he* is—has done for us one of his inimitable and salty sagas of the South Pacific, "Lush Berries Are Lovely." It's the log of the *Annabelle* on her voyage to Jigger's Reef where she met, and you might say immobilized, the *Matsui Maru*, pride of the Jap navy, with the help of Porpoise the skipper, and several bottles of gin.

★

GOUVERNEUR MORRIS (Step up if you are a real Old-Timer) opened Vol. I, No. I, of our magazine with the first installment of his memorable serial, "Yellow Men and Gold." He hasn't been with us since the novel concluded in February 1912, and we're happy to have him with us again after all these years. He gives us "Ballad of a Beachcomber" next month.

GEORGES SURDEZ gives us a tale of North Africa *since* the invasion—then there'll be the usual departments and features including an Ask Adventure letter from GORDON MacCREAGH that'll give you a chuckle.

On Sale January 8th

(Continued from page 127)

He has fought his last battle. May the last trumpet awake him to glory again.
—F.

Now, if that letter tells the truth—and if, as the historians insist, there never was but that one coward in the Pony Express—then what becomes of Pony Bob's ride, supposed to have happened in the same month at the same place under the same circumstances?

Either Pony Bob never did it. Or Richardson was given a second chance and showed the yellow streak a second time. Or—Could both stories be true?

No one knows the exact dates of the great ride. It was some time in May, and tradition rather vaguely fixes it in early May, *before* the Battle of Pyramid Lake, giving Bob Haslam credit for bringing west the first news of the Piute raids. That would date the great ride as starting with the eastbound mail that left Friday Station on May 5.

The next eastbound mail went through Friday Station on May 12, just about the time the Battle of Pyramid Lake was being fought, and quite possibly Pony Bob with the mail, and Riley returning from the battle, both reached Bucklands late that night.

If so, this trip was Pony Bob's first since the great ride a week before. Those who have experienced overstrain will agree that the let-down was terrific and that Pony Bob probably felt it still, to such an extent that the 85 miles of his regular run on May 12 would make him *feel* more tired than did the nearly 400 of May 5-7. Is this where Riley came in?

When Pony Bob, weary and cross, discovered that in the excitement no one had been hired to replace the coward Richardson, did he snap: "So just because I broke all records one trip, I'm to do it every time! Not bloody likely! That soldier over there who's in such a hurry to volunteer is welcome; this is my night to sleep!"

It would be very human behavior. Not that of a man who felt he had to live up to being a hero. But then the Pony riders were not self-conscious about being heroes. They had glory to spare.

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